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## **Exploring the Factors Affecting University Students' Interest in International News: Gender, Nationality, Field of Study and Political Activity**

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*Master* in International Studies,

Supervisor:

Professor Tiago Lapa, Assistant Professor,

ISCTE - Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

July, 2024



SOCIOLOGIA  
E POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS

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Department of History

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## RESUMO

Os estudantes universitários representam um grupo-chave de jovens adultos que consomem notícias. Esta investigação teve como objetivo compreender quais os fatores que influenciam o nível de interesse dos estudantes pelas notícias internacionais e a escolha dos temas noticiosos. Durante um mês, estudantes de todas as áreas académicas e de todo o mundo responderam a um questionário online através do Qualtrics. O SPSS e testes não-paramétricos foram utilizados para testar várias hipóteses, nomeadamente as relações entre o género, a nacionalidade, a área de estudo, o envolvimento político, e as preferências dos meios de comunicação social (*media*) dos estudantes, e o seu nível de interesse e seleção de temas de notícias internacionais. Este estudo revelou uma diferença significativa do nível de interesse em notícias internacionais entre as áreas de estudo dos estudantes, as suas atividades políticas e os novos *media*, em particular as aplicações digitais dos *media* tradicionais e os podcasts. Verificou-se, também, uma relação significativa entre tópicos de notícias e o género, a nacionalidade, a área académica e o envolvimento político dos estudantes. Compreender estas influências é essencial para a academia, os decisores políticos e as organizações mediáticas que procuram promover a consciência global e o envolvimento dos estudantes num mundo cada vez mais interligado.

Palavras-chave: estudantes universitários, consumo de notícias, género, nacionalidade, área académica, envolvimento político

## **ABSTRACT**

University students represent a key group of young adults engaging with the news. This research aimed to understand which factors influence students' level of interest in international news and choice of news topics. During one month, students from all academic backgrounds and from all over the world answered an online questionnaire via Qualtrics. SPSS and non-parametric tests were used to test several hypotheses, namely the relationships between students' gender, nationality, field of study, political engagement, and media preferences, and their level of interest and selection of international news genres. This study showed a significant difference in the level of interest in international news among students' fields of study, political engagement and new media outlets, particularly traditional media apps and podcasts. There was also a significant relationship between news topics and students' gender, nationality, academic field and political engagement. Understanding these influences is essential for academics, policymakers, and media organisations seeking to promote global awareness and student engagement in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: university students, news consumption, gender, nationality, academic field, political engagement

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## **ACRONYMS**

AI	Artificial Intelligence
ES	Effect Size
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
SPSS	Statistical Product and Service Solutions
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
U.S.	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organisation
WWW	World Wide Web

## INTRODUCTION

In a more globalised world, day by day, and with technological advancements, individuals connect beyond the national sphere, with knowledge dissemination shaping perceptions and actions (Castells, 2009). Different cultures, people and entertainment have been spreading worldwide, and one way of gaining knowledge about the world is through international news. International news is important since people rely on this information to learn and create opinions about other countries and issues (Zamith, 2022; Beckers et al., 2020; Guo & Vargo, 2017; Traquina, 2005). It is a significant interdisciplinary subject of research since this sort of information can have a widespread and profound influence on many aspects of human life. For example, international news can affect other states and countries. The Black Lives Matter movement or the war protests exemplify this effect (Coles et al., 2023; Ray, 2022; Westerman et al., 2020; Krastev, 2014). That is, events that occur in one country have the potential to reach a global audience due to the widespread dissemination of information.

This interconnectedness emphasises the importance of understanding how different groups, namely students, engage with such news in today's digital era. Why students? In 2019, 6.1 million students were pursuing a degree worldwide (France, 2022). Students are called social and digital natives, who grew up in the social, participatory web and in the information age (Newman et al., 2022; Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020). Like other generations, these individuals have consumption habits highly influenced by Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and can execute different activities through the new media. Besides, this population is at a significant moment, characterised by the construction of their identities and cultural meanings (Morduchowicz, 2018, as cited in Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020). Therefore, this project focused on university students' international news consumption since they are among the youngest adults who use social media more. In particular, it examined students from the academic years 2023/2024 and 2022/2023, for more current data, and who belonged to any university degree.

The effect of news on people's perceptions and actions sparked the creation of a new research field from, at least, the early 1940s, with the Uses and Gratifications theory. Several models were created, namely the Framing theory, which argues that the media's presentation of an event can shape individuals' interpretation and understanding (Zamith, 2022). However, the Uses and Gratifications approach disregard the media power and claimed that individuals

actively seek out and access news due to specific motives, social and psychological antecedents, and gratifications (McQuail, 2010; Papacharissi, 2009).

Considering those approaches, this study attempted to combine the two theories to get a more complete picture of the influence of students' characteristics and media power in news consumption. Gender was chosen since several studies mentioned its effect on news engagement, such as the existence of a gender bias in news consumption (Sui et al., 2022; Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019). Nationality can be crucial to comprehend how individuals interact with international news based on their national identity and cultural values (Sakurai, 2017; Owens & Lily, 2017). The academic field can be relevant to understanding whether students in particular fields of study are more or less interested in specific international news topics (Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023; Head et al., 2019). Lastly, political activity can help uncover whether politically active students have different news consumption and interest patterns (Kara, 2018; Loader, 2007). In addition, regarding media power, numerous studies mentioned a coexistence of new and traditional media to news engagement, with the Internet as a primary news source (Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Agbolabori, 2018; Head et al., 2018). Thus, studying international news' consumption can help to gain insights into how international events are perceived and interpreted across different cultures and societies.

Although a substantial body of literature has explored gender bias in news consumption, media use for political activism, and news engagement through traditional and new media, little is known about international news consumption by university students. In particular, there is still a gap in the literature regarding how nationality, field of study, and political activity influence news engagement. In light of these limitations, the main objective of this dissertation was to understand whether sociodemographic (gender and nationality) and social (field of study and political engagement) variables played a significant role in determining the level of interest university students have in international news and news topics. As subsidiary objectives, there was an intent to identify whether young adults preferred traditional or new media to access new information and the reasons behind it. In other words, this paper aimed to get a more comprehensive picture of which characteristics influence the selection of international media content. It also sought to fill the gap in the literature by examining from an international perspective the similarities and differences of news consumption. Thus, the data gathered in this research could be relevant not only to the field of media studies but also to the broader academic community. Furthermore, it could be helpful for media outlets and news organisations

to understand their audience better and adapt their content accordingly, potentially leading to more engaging and relevant content.

The methodology used to achieve this study's goals was an online survey. International news was studied as a central category that comprises other news topics typically studied, such as sports and politics. Thus, the research question is:

- Do factors such as gender, nationality, field of study and political activity influence university students' interest in International News nowadays? Do students prefer traditional or digital media to access new information?

This dissertation starts by framing the concept of news, mentioning the main ideas regarding the influence of gender, nationality, field of study, political activity, and media sources on news consumption. The second chapter discusses the methodology, detailing the online questionnaire's execution and its advantages and disadvantages. The subsequent chapter is divided into the survey's results and the inferential statistics to test the hypothesis. It is followed by their discussion and comparisons with existing literature. Finally, the conclusion synthesises key findings and further remarks on the international news field. The sources for this thesis, the questionnaire, and the appendices are also presented at the end.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (United Nations, n.d., Article 19).

This first chapter contextualises the rest of the research, grounding it in the authors’ concepts and arguments about the present study object: the factors influencing university students’ consumption of international news.

### News or the News

“News has been a part of human societies for as long as we have been able to communicate complex ideas” (Zamith, 2022, p.4). A front-page news story in Portugal might not appear in a newspaper in the United States (U.S.). Hence, what does “news” mean? Zamith (2022) and Shoemaker (2006) argue that “news” and “the news” are cultural constructs whose meanings vary across locations since they depend on ways of thinking and result from the interaction between various social agents (Traquina, 2005). However, the primary definition is that news is novel information about recent affairs, making it a form of knowledge about our world (Zamith, 2022; Shoemaker, 2006). Lopes (2014) goes even further, mentioning the various research studies from van Dijk, arguing that we can understand news as a form of public, political, social, and cultural discourse.

News is essential for various reasons. Firstly, it allows us to stay informed about what is happening around us (Beckers et al., 2020; Traquina, 2005). Secondly, news helps us to understand a given issue, either local or international, especially if individuals have little contact with other parts of the world (Zamith, 2022). Thirdly, it allows us to make informed decisions about a matter that can affect us. Additionally, it influences critical thinking, as the numerous sources give us several points of view to better assess our opinion. Besides, news can foster democracy, as a well-informed citizen can be more engaged in solving the community’s problems and make informed decisions about whom to support (Sui et al., 2022; Head et al., 2018; Antunovic et al., 2016). News can shape public opinion dramatically, leading to public calls for governmental intervention. For example, there were worldwide protests in support of Ukraine and against Russia’s invasion of this country, where protesters called for the end of the war and for the intervention of European countries to assist Ukraine (Agence France-Presse,

2024; BBC, 2024; Al Jazeera, 2023). Lastly, keeping up with the news can alert us to potential threats, allowing us to take the necessary precautions. For instance, during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic, news media was as a primary source of information for preventing infection and controlling the virus's spread (Casero-Ripollés, 2021). Some studies even found a positive correlation between news consumption and adherence to COVID-19 precautions (Smail et al., 2023; Scopelliti et al., 2021).

In journalism, it is crucial to understand that news is not an inherent or natural entity; instead, as previously mentioned, it is a construct influenced by many actors, including journalists and even algorithms used in news writing (Zamith, 2022; Traquina, 2005). Sakurai (2017) mentions that there are roughly two types of factors that influence the flow of international news: intrinsic (event-oriented) and extrinsic (context-oriented).

Intrinsic factors involve considering news values; however, determining what qualifies as newsworthy is a complex, inherently subjective process. With a vast amount of content to cover and time being a crucial factor, Galtung and Ruge's (1965) landmarked research identified specific news values. These values increase the likelihood of a potential story being seen as newsworthy and receiving coverage by the media (Erjavec & Zajc, 2011). However, a more recent study by Harcup and O'Neil (2017) outlined fifteen news values<sup>1</sup>, including the ones previously mentioned by Galtung and Ruge (1965). Both authors argued that the higher the number of news values a potential story is considered to meet, the more likely it is to be deemed newsworthy and gain coverage by journalistic media. However, it is worth noting that these values are most representative of Western journalistic cultures and may not hold the same weight in other parts of the world (Zamith, 2022). For instance, we can analyse the media coverage of the Titanic Sub disaster of the millionaires compared to what was likely the second-deadliest refugee and migrant shipwreck on record off the Greek coast. Both are bad news but the submarine disaster was more widely reported (Shepard, 2023; Silva, 2023). The first event underscores the values of elite, celebrities and surprise compared with the values of conflict and drama overused by ongoing news from refugees (Zamith, 2022).

Extrinsic factors are extra-media components, such as cultural and geographical proximity, the relationship, and the history between a foreign and domestic country (Sakurai, 2017). For example, having the same language and sharing cultural values and history, the U.S. population

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<sup>1</sup> Exclusivity, Power elite, Magnitude, Relevance, Surprise, Conflict, Drama, Bad news, Good news, Entertainment, Celebrity, Audio-visuals, Shareability, Follow-up, and Journalistic outlet's agenda.

is more often exposed to news from the United Kingdom than Mongolia. Additionally, international coverage typically focuses on more economically, militarily and geopolitical important superpowers, leaving the Global South underrepresented (Zamith, 2022; Guo & Vargo, 2017). The limited coverage of emerging countries happens mostly when something negative or disastrous happens (Zamith, 2022). There is also considerable disparity in the media coverage of countries worldwide, and different representations of the same event are often presented in other parts of the world. Thus, international news coverage has a geocentric tendency and regionalism (Zamith, 2022).

In addition, sensationalism in media often involves prioritising viral and dramatic stories, such as scandals, to capture audience attention and boost ratings. Although there is no universal definition of sensationalism, it typically involves presenting specific events in ways that appeal to individuals' emotions, often dramatising ordinary incidents (Arbaoui et al., 2016; Brown et al., 2016; Udeze & Uzuegbunam, 2013). This emphasis on sensational events can detract from providing thorough coverage of critical international issues (Zamith, 2022). Sensationalism can obscure news values because journalists might highlight particular events to appeal to audiences, potentially overshadowing or underreporting crucial global events and challenges for public awareness. In addition, the popular press, known for being sensationalist<sup>2</sup>, can overvalue national news. It prefers to give subjective attention to events and report trivial matters likely to attract audiences, thereby increasing advertising revenue (Amaral, 2006, as cited in Valadares, 2013; Udeze & Uzuegbunam, 2013). Moreover, national news is more accessible and cheaper for journalists and media outlets than international news (Zamith, 2022).

In discussing international news, it is crucial to distinguish it from local and national news based on both geographic and content-related criteria (Zamith, 2022; Sakurai, 2017). Local media report newsworthy events for a limited audience within specific regions and boundaries. National media is centred on the nation-state and covers information relevant to the target audience but is restricted and limited by national borders. However, due to the development of new communication technologies and globalisation, it is possible to transcend these boundaries and get information from diverse cultures and societies.

Several authors see international news as a unique journalism category since no other news genre has such a broad and profound effect on many aspects of people's lives (Zamith, 2022).

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<sup>2</sup> Some authors argue, however, that sensationalism can be found in any media (Amaral, 2006) and topic (Brown et al., 2016).



Some foreign events can influence activism and change, such as war protests, as previously mentioned. Theories to explain these influences started to appear in the early 1940s, namely the Uses and Gratifications theory. Nowadays, at least four theories are debated.

There is the Gatekeeping theory, based on the model by Kurt Lewin, in which news editors and journalists act as gatekeepers, deciding which stories to cover and how to present them to the public (Erjavec & Zajc, 2011). It argues that the information that reaches the audience is “specific, selective and has passed a lot of editing gates before being published” (Janani, 2021, para.5). Since there are too many events for the media to cover, journalists choose the occurrences based on several factors: events, social and political forces, economic norms of the company, the ideology of the journalists, and the audience’s interest.

The Agenda-setting theory argues that news media can shape public opinion by determining which issues and genres are covered in the news (Zamith, 2022; Erjavec & Zajc, 2011). In other words, the amount of coverage an issue receives determines how important viewers believe it to be. For example, during election campaigns and political debates, media informs the public about the changes a party has implemented or plans to implement (Janani, 2021). It also implies that the media effect is weakened for those confident of their opinion.

According to the Framing theory, how an event is presented can shape individuals’ interpretation and understanding. Closely related to the previous theory, it declares that media frames may influence individuals’ understandings and attitudes towards a topic or issue. However, these effects are not consistent or universal since it presumes that individuals act based on their unique perceptions of reality (Zamith, 2022; Janani, 2021). While the Framing theory connects media coverage to shaping attitudes on various topics, the Agenda-Setting model concentrates on the connection between media coverage and the perceived importance of an issue.

On the other hand, the Uses and Gratifications theory, first advanced in the 1940s by Lasswell, argues that individuals actively seek out and access news because of specific needs, motives and gratifications (Rayburn & Palmgreen, 1984, as cited in Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Papacharissi, 2009). Besides, this audience-based model studies the social and personal characteristics since many different types of content are available (Morley, 1992). There are several needs which differ from author to author, such as surveillance of the environment (Papacharissi, 2009), cognitive and affective needs (Katz et al., 1973), integration and social interaction, and entertainment (McQuail, 2010), to name a few. For instance, “a blog fulfils

expressive needs for some bloggers, social communication needs for others, and information seeking and surveillance needs for yet other bloggers” (Papacharissi, 2009, p.144). However, the Uses and Gratification theory does not consider the media power. It also does not address the reliability of self-report data from the audience (Vinney, 2024; Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021).

Thus, which factors influence individuals to keep up with the news? For this study, gender, nationality, field of study, and political engagement were the main issues chosen to study how audience characteristics influence their news interest. The subsequent chapters discuss the relevance and implications of identifying these factors, as well as the existing knowledge concerning their impact.

### **Gender Disparities in News Consumption**

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) (2019),

Gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time. Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. (para. 1-2)

A long-standing issue is gender bias in the news, which occurs due to expected norms: “News articles published by media produced and reproduced bias or stereotypes in societies” (Foucault, 1990, as cited in Zhang, 2021, p.13). In other words, this biased or stereotypical content contributes to the reinforcement and perpetuation of gender representations (Del Teso-Craviotto, 2006). Thus, what evidence do we have that gender bias influences the audience?

Numerous authors argue that gender bias makes hard news<sup>3</sup> reserved for men, whereas soft news<sup>4</sup> belongs to women (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Steiner, 2014; Boydston, 2013). Research found that U.S. and international politics, science and sports, that is, hard news, were prevalent among men than women (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Zhang, 2021).

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<sup>3</sup> A journalistic style focusing on timely and consequential events to people, covering topics such as politics, international affairs, economics, and science (Deng, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> It encompasses human-interest stories, entertainment, arts, celebrities, and culture-related topics, lacking perceived urgency (Deng, 2023).

In contrast, the stereotypically feminine genres of entertainment, music, literature, family, relationships, health and nutrition, fashion, culture, environment, travelling and social media, that is, soft news, were popular among women. As suggested by Gneezy et al. (2009, as cited in Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021), men's greater interest in news with competitive elements may be influenced by environmental factors. The author mentions that this finding reflects Western cultural norms where competition is often encouraged more among men than women.

On the other hand, Hargrove and Stempel III (2002) found that women had greater interest in various genres of international news than men, namely news involving regular people and political events. Besides, while both Kaspar and Fuchs (2021) and Sui et al. (2022) discovered that men were the biggest consumers of economy and technology, Zhang's study (2021) showed that women were more interested in immigration, economy, and technology than men. In addition, contrary to Zhang's study, women reported a higher interest in crime, accidents, and disasters (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021). These results may be due to women searching for more risky journalistic genres, such as disasters and crime, in order to avoid dangerous situations (Hughes, 2023; Byrnes et al., 1999).

Other authors, such as Sui et al. (2022), offer a different perspective, suggesting that people perceive that news is for men, leading to a lack of interest from women. This large percentage of women avoiders may be due to several reasons. Women tend to consider the public sphere and careers like politics as masculine concerns due to gendered views about suitable social roles. In these views, men exhibit agentic features like toughness, while women show communal ones like caring (Eagly & Karau, 2002, as cited in Sui et al., 2022). Nevertheless, these traits do not signify that women do not engage with news since, as previously mentioned, they are interested in various news topics.

Moreover, despite an increase in the number of women working in news organisations, gender inequality in the news suggests that issues seen as masculine are given more significant airtime and prominence. This scenario implies that the news is not pertinent to or intended for women (Sui et al., 2022). Another explanation is that women may prefer seeking news to satisfy their daily needs for information on the weather and local events. Conversely, men may choose political news, which receives more media attention (Sui et al., 2022). Lastly, the lack of quality leisure time brought on by the increased responsibility of childcare and household work may also leave women "feeling physically and emotionally drained" (Sui et al., 2022, p.5). As a result, they may prefer skipping the news to avoid taking on additional emotional burdens.

In addition, Steiner (2014) mentions the inequality in the newsroom and the perseverance of old gendered conventions as another justification for gender bias. However, looking at the percentage of outputted authors, Zhang's paper concluded that both men and women contributed to the genres of international politics, U.S. politics, and law and crime. Nevertheless, in sports journalism, female authors had fewer outputs than male authors, which "reflected the stereotype that Sports is more masculine" (Zhang, 2021, p.47).

Gender is central to news preferences research (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021). However, the influence of gender on international news interests remains underexplored. It is crucial that women are interested in the news since, as previously mentioned, informed citizens are the foundation of democracy. It means that when "public trust in journalism erodes, democracy is threatened" (Sui et al., 2022, p.2). In addition, media companies lose advertising income if they cannot appeal to female viewers. Therefore, with more women in the newsroom, marginalised stories and different perspectives are more likely to appear, helping the audience relate to a particular topic (Dhiman, 2023; Sui et al., 2022).

### **Nationality and its Role in News Preferences**

As previously mentioned, cultural and geographical proximity, language, and history can influence which news is presented in the national media (Sakurai, 2017). However, does a person's nationality have a similar effect?

Individuals may feel a sense of allegiance or connection to their birth country, known as their national identity. This identity, which mirrors national ideals and narratives, can influence individuals' choice of news sources. Szostek (2017) found that even university students sceptical of state-aligned media still resonated with negative claims about other countries, underscoring the profound influence of national narratives in staying informed.

A person's nationality often reflects their cultural background, which includes language, traditions, and beliefs (Matthews, 2022; Owens & Lily, 2017). For example, students from nations with a strong historical involvement in international events may be more inclined to seek out foreign news (Iyengar et al., 2010). Joyce and Harlow's (2020) study also demonstrated that various Latin American individuals consumed news from other countries that shared the same language (Spanish).

Migrants might seek news outlets from their home country to stay connected with their roots and traditions and create a sense of community (Faustino et al., 2021; Joyce & Harlow,

2020). At the same time, these individuals also engage with news from their host country in order to integrate and stay informed about local affairs and bureaucratic procedures (Faustino et al., 2021). This bicultural perspective can lead to a broader interest in international news, as migrants often maintain a transnational position, or it can be a way to isolate migrants.

In addition, a student's interest in foreign news can also be influenced by their country's political situation and media landscape. Each country has a unique mix of issues, ranging from political events and economic policies to social and cultural trends. For example, the U.S.'s pure market-based system<sup>5</sup> offers low hard news coverage, while the Finnish commercial channel delivers as much hard news as the public broadcaster. This disparity is evident since "The number of countries referenced in US newscasts was approximately two-thirds the number that received mention in European news" (Iyengar et al., 2010, p. 299). In addition, national news media often prioritise coverage of particular political events. For example, before and throughout the Iraq war, media coverage heavily supported the Bush administration's stance, leading a majority of North Americans to support the war (Lebow, 2010; Kumar, 2006). However, when no evidence from prior claims of the existence of weapons of mass destruction was found, the majority of the population no longer supported that war.

Moreover, people engage with international news to get a different perspective, understand other issues and have access to better-quality content (Widholm, 2019, as cited in Joyce & Harlow, 2020). Thus, language proficiency can impact individuals' access to and consumption of international news. Elites (individuals with high social status or influence) tend to be more able to engage with news whose language is different than the one from their home country (Joyce & Harlow, 2020). Conversely, monolingual individuals are limited to news sources in their country's language.

Nationality is an important factor in news consumption, as a person's allegiance to their country or cultural background can influence the type of content they seek. However, little is known about the influence of this factor on international news consumption.

### **Field of Study's Impact on Information Preferences**

Beyond personal characteristics, external factors may also influence their choices. Many authors argue that each university has its own particular culture, with different missions and

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<sup>5</sup> "Market-based systems are characterized by private ownership of major news organizations and minimal regulation of the media" (Iyengar et al., 2010, p. 292).

goals (Lucas & Murry, 2007; Douglas, 1997, as cited in Lucas & Murry, 2007). In addition, each discipline has its own symbols and knowledge organisation, which influences students' ways of thinking, motives, career expectations, abilities, interests, and values (Owens & Lily, 2017; Orji, 2010; Smart et al., 2006; Clark, 1999, as cited in Owens & Lily, 2017). For example, Holland's theory emphasises the impact of academic disciplines on the professional lives of college faculty and the educational lives of students (Pike, 2006).

Arts and Humanities and Social and Behavioural Sciences students reported higher news engagement outside and in classes than students majoring in STEM subjects<sup>6</sup> (Head et al., 2019). The incorporation of news into the discussions of academic subjects was a significant factor contributing to the higher level of news presented in classes (Head et al., 2019; Head et al., 2018). Conversely, the low level of news engagement in STEM programmes resulted from professors' focus on solutions to textbook problems (Head et al., 2019). In other words, in particular fields of study, news was rarely addressed as part of their program. Additionally, some academic fields, such as Sciences and Health, are more likely to use ICT, which may influence students' digital skills (Barboutidis & Stiakakis, 2023; Salifu & Odame, 2023; Owens & Lily, 2017; Orji, 2010). However, according to Holland's theory, students' personalities and interests also play a significant role in their academic choices (Smart et al., 2006). This self-selection signifies that students may choose their fields with varying levels of news engagement, which then interacts with the discipline-specific influences described earlier.

There is a tendency to study news engagement only from students who belong to journalism or communication fields. Nevertheless, there is a need to integrate news discussion into classrooms and reduce barriers to accessing news. This can be achieved by linking theory and textbooks to current news and helping students to distinguish between real and fake news. The studies by Head et al. (2018) and Klopfenstein et al. (2024) underscore this need and the potential benefits of such integration.

### **Political Activity and News Engagement**

Citizenship is being altered by globalisation, social fragmentation, and individualisation (Loader, 2007). The author argues that this shift challenges traditional norms and values, with the nation-state's significance declining and individuals embracing multiple identities beyond nationality, often influenced by consumerist ideals. However, contemporary political

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<sup>6</sup> Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math.

landscapes present a complex picture. The resurgence of political movements with strong nationalist agendas, which advocate for the prioritisation of national interests over global ones, indicates that the nation-state remains significant for many individuals (Mylonas & Tudor, 2021; Hart, 2020). Consequently, this change in citizenship impacts young people's political engagement, sparking a debate about their level of involvement. Some authors argue that the younger generation lacks a strong sense of citizenship - they are *disaffected* - while others claim that young adults engage with politics differently, aligning political activities with their self-interests - they are *displaced* (Loader, 2007). This conceptual cleavage is only one of the various interpretations of this topic, but it allows the study of the young adults' political engagement.

From the citizen-*disaffected* perspective, traditional political activities such as voting, belonging to a party, and going to a political meeting are related to traditional and cultural institutions which provide collective political meaning. However, these organisations are being deinstitutionalised by the global informational economy (Castells, 2009; Loader, 2007). Hence, the cultural *displacement* perspective looks at deinstitutionalised forms of political engagement and informal social structures. It particularly emphasises the new media since it has less regulated personal interaction and provides access to various international political influences. Therefore, marching, protesting, and boycotting are also viewed as part of the scope of democratic politics.

We realised that political participation can take various forms, such as voting, signing petitions, participating in protests, and others. Research on political activism behaviours of university students reveals a prevailing trend of limited engagement in online political activities. More than half of the student population is not politically involved, refraining from working for a political party or joining online social groups (Kara, 2018). Several factors contribute to this observed low level of political engagement. Firstly, students may often feel uncomfortable with online political discussions. This discomfort is primarily due to the confrontational nature of such debates, where individuals passionately advocate for their own political beliefs, leading to heated arguments and offensive language (Newman et al., 2022). Secondly, students are concerned about potential repercussions in their future lives, particularly in their careers. Lastly, students may also feel societal pressure (Kara, 2018).

On the other hand, some researchers found that young individuals actively participate in politics, primarily through online platforms (De-la-Garza-Montemayor et al., 2019; Kara, 2018; Newman, 2012). Examples of these activities include using the Internet to sign petitions or

express political opinions. Kara's analysis (2018) also revealed that students who regularly used e-government services tended to be more politically active on the Internet than students who did not. Joining a campaign and contributing to a political cause were common political activities among young individuals (Newman, 2012). However, there was a low emailing rate about a political candidate/issue.

Numerous studies examine the media's influence on people's political knowledge and participation, as well as how political ideology influences news engagement (De-la-Garza-Montemayor et al., 2019; Ashley et al., 2017; Kruikemeier & Sheata, 2017). Although Bonaparte and Kumar (2013) found that politically active individuals are typically information seekers who enjoy keeping up with the news, research on how political participation influences news consumption seems scarce.

### **Traditional media versus New media: A complimentary relationship?**

There is a widespread perception that young individuals are less interested in news. Previous research showed that individuals between 18 and 34 years old did not engage with news websites, print newspapers or television news (Oppili & Padmanabhan, 2023; Antunovic et al., 2016; Young, 2015; Huang, 2009). Is it true, then, that young adults are *disaffected*? Or, in reality, are they *displaced* by using other media outlets<sup>7</sup>?

In recent years, the number of people engaging with news via traditional outlets has declined, while online news audiences have increased (Pérez et al., 2019; Antunovic et al., 2016; Clark, 2010). Several authors accuse traditional media for young people's lack of interest since individuals change over time, but media does not try to adapt to new generations (Pérez et al., 2019; Yuste, 2015; Huang, 2009). Clark and Marchi (2017) also found that young people are not the media's target. Zamith (2022) and Bergström and Belfrage (2018) also argue that the decline in international news through traditional outlets can be attributed to high production costs and the increasing number of freelance and citizen journalists (Paul & Berkowitz, 2019).

There is still an effort from the media to change the traditional rules and to write their information in a more youthful language, especially through cyberjournalism (Ligeiro, 2022; Huang, 2009). Cyberjournalism, also known as digital or online journalism, is one of the attempts of traditional media, such as newspapers and television, to adapt to technological

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<sup>7</sup> Debate taken from Loader (2007) regarding political activity. In this case, it also seems to characterise the news consumption of the young population.



evolutions (Ligeiro, 2022). According to Canavilhas (2006), cyberjournalism can be divided into essential and interesting characteristics. The former encompasses hypertextuality, multimediality, interactivity and memory, while the second comprises instantaneity, ubiquity and personalisation (Costa, 2020; Barbosa, 2018; Canavilhas, 2006). Nonetheless, Ligeiro (2022) also mentions tactility, which can be explored on mobile devices. Traditional media apps are examples of cyberjournalism, which work as a door to access news without recurring to browsers and websites (Ligeiro, 2022). However, Costa (2020) argues that journals use social media as clickbait. Newspapers use these spaces to invite users to the site's content using short news items loaded with an embedded external hyperlink.

Cyberjournalism only appeared with the creation of the Internet. It is impossible to credit the invention of the Internet to a single person. "The first workable prototype of the Internet came in the late 1960s" (Andrews, 2019, para.4), funded by the United States Department of Defense. However, it was only in 1983 that researchers assembled the modern Internet. Nevertheless, the milestone was in 1989 when Tim Berners-Lee invented the World Wide Web (WWW), a system to share information, dictating the beginning of global communication with accessibility to a wide range of information (Ligeiro, 2022; Andrews, 2019; Castells, 2009).

The first version of the WWW, Web 1.0, was a read-only web version that provided information without affecting the pages (Hiremath & Kenchakkanavar, 2016; Naik & Shivalingaiah, 2008). According to Gil (2014), it was the true Information Society where we could access everything at any time of the day. Web 2.0 was a read-write web that allowed collaborative content creation and alteration, such as social media (Hiremath & Kenchakkanavar, 2016; Gil, 2014; Naik & Shivalingaiah, 2008). Lastly, Web 3.0 provided semantic-aware (content) and context-aware connections, such as AI platforms and virtual reality (Hiremath & Kenchakkanavar, 2016; Gil, 2014). New media characteristics include interactivity, multimediality, hypertextuality, personalisation, memory, convergence, and virtuality (Lopes, 2014). The Internet and social media have revolutionised news consumption for young individuals, offering accessibility, free-of-charge characteristics<sup>8</sup>, and a range of formats (Newman et al., 2022; Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Antunovic et al., 2016; Huang, 2009). However, the content shown to the user is usually chosen by an algorithm based on the user's interest, creating a lack of other points of view and content, leading to a biased view (Oppili & Padmanabhan, 2023; Presuel & Sierra, 2019; Lopes, 2014).

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<sup>8</sup> Usually, students are not financially independent or stable during this phase (Huang, 2009).

Young individuals rely heavily on social media, but newspapers' websites and television follow closely behind (Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Barbosa, 2019; Head et al., 2018; Silveira & Amaral, 2018; Lopes, 2014). However, even though social media is the primary news source, young individuals often question its reliability (Ligeiro, 2022; Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Agbolabori, 2018). Thus, trust is higher in the traditional media, which presents a higher level of data protection and a controlled environment that prevents fake news (Van Dijk, 2006). This coexistence of traditional and new media characterises young individuals' news consumption as multimodal, meaning students engage with news from various pathways (Head et al., 2018; Agbolabori, 2018).

In sum, briefly addressing each factor's importance, gender is central to news preferences research (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021), but there is an ongoing debate on its influence on news engagement. While there is limited research on gender influence on international news interest, preferences for different news topics are commonly studied. Nationality, for example, a person's allegiance to their country or cultural background, can influence the content they seek. However, little is known about this factor's influence on international news consumption.

Studies about news consumption based on students' fields of study are scarce and usually concern students in journalism or communication fields. Since each academic field has its course plan and interests, it can influence the lecture content. For example, research indicated that news is more frequently presented in classes due to incorporating news into academic discussions (Head et al., 2019; Head et al., 2018). Regarding political engagement, there is a debate about the level of participation of young adults in political activities. Nevertheless, little is known about political activities influencing news consumption.

Lastly, it is important also to consider the power of the media. News outlets are typically divided into traditional and new media. Although most findings suggest that the Internet is the primary news source, followed by news websites or television, there is a coexistence of new and traditional media (Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Head et al., 2018). Besides, while some authors argue that young individuals may not be interested in news, data shows that new media is their primary source for accessing news. Therefore, investigating the impact of all these factors on news consumption can help address the gaps in the literature.

## METHODOLOGY

Based on the contextualisation provided in the previous section, the following chapter presents the research plan whose primary goal is to answer the questions:

- Do factors such as gender, nationality, field of study and political activity influence university students' interest in International News nowadays? Do students prefer traditional or digital media to access new information?

### **a. Framework of analysis: Hypothesis and operationalisation**

“Without theory, there is nothing but description, and without methodology, there is no transformation of theory into analysis” (Hansen, 2006, p.1).

The Uses and Gratification Theory is the starting point. This model tends to have a framework of analysis that focuses on 1. Motives, 2. Social and Psychological Antecedents, and 3. Consequences or Effects of a given media consumption (Papacharissi, 2009; Morley, 1992). This study will focus on the second point, Social and Psychological Antecedents. It explores how sociodemographic variables, such as gender and nationality, and social variables, such as field of study and political engagement, influence the media content selection. This study, however, is not limited to this theory. The Framing Theory will provide a more comprehensive picture and address the limitations of the previous theory, which did not account for media power. This second theory encompasses the analysis of situational factors and visual properties of news presentations (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021). In other words, this theory addresses the subsidiary research question about the preference for traditional versus new media in accessing news, ensuring a comprehensive approach to the study.

In line with these frameworks, it is crucial to define concepts. In this study, international news encompasses any news outside each student's country of origin since we also wanted to analyse answers from students who are not Portuguese. International news is the central news category and can be further divided into topics such as politics, economy, and others.

In addition, university students are defined as those currently or previously enrolled in any university worldwide during the academic years 2023/2024 and 2022/2023, and who are or were registered for a Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree.

“Interest” can be defined as the degree to which a university student engages with or actively seeks out information related to external affairs. As indicators, we have the students'

self-reported interest in global affairs. The former was measured using a 6-point Likert scale, where participants rated their interest in international news, with 1 being “Very Uninterested” and 6 being “Very Interested”. This variable is ordinal since we only know that one score is higher than another, not the distance between the points.

For the first nominal indicator, Gender refers to an individual’s self-identified gender identity and a multifaceted construct. The survey provided two other options besides male and female to ensure inclusivity. Prior research concluded that gender plays a central role in news preferences. Although there is not much specific research about gender influence on international news interest, we cannot state the same about the news genre preference. Some authors (Zhang, 2021; Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Boydston, 2013) mentioned that gender bias in news consumption makes hard news reserved for men and soft news for women. However, other findings suggest that women interact more with some hard news topics than men, resulting in no significant gender difference (Zhang, 2021; Hargrove & Stempel III, 2002). Hence, the hypotheses:

- H<sub>1</sub>: There is a relationship between gender and the level of interest in international news.
- H<sub>2</sub>: There is a relationship between gender and the choice of international news genre.

Nationality refers to an individual’s legal affiliation or status with a specific nation or country, acquired by birth or naturalisation. Participants will self-report their nationality. Previous findings suggest that national identity influences individuals’ choice of news sources, reflecting cultural backgrounds and shaping their perspectives on international events (Szostek, 2017; Matthews, 2022; Joyce & Harlow, 2020; Owens & Lily, 2017). Political context and media landscape further impact news coverage priorities across countries (Iyengar et al., 2010; Lebow, 2010; Kumar, 2006). In addition, language proficiency can influence access to diverse perspectives and higher-quality content (Joyce & Harlow, 2020). Therefore,

- H<sub>3</sub>: There is a relationship between nationality and the level of interest in international news.
- H<sub>4</sub>: There is a relationship between nationality and the choice of international news genre.

Field of Study refers to the specific field or academic area a university student pursues as part of their higher education, such as Engineering, Social Sciences, and others. Participants self-reported their field of study by specifying their academic major. As previously mentioned, little is known about the influence of the field of study on news consumption. Usually, the focus

of past papers was on a specific academic area, leading to the exclusion of the numerous fields of higher education. Nevertheless, research found that a higher amount of news presented in classes was due to the incorporation of news into the discussions of academic subjects (Head et al., 2019; Head et al., 2018). That is, since each academic field has its ways of thinking, motives, abilities, and interests, it also has its course plan, which will influence how the classes are going to be lectured and which sources will be used (Owens & Lily, 2017; Orji, 2010; Smart et al., 2006). Hence, the proposed hypotheses for this nominal variable are:

- H<sub>5</sub>: There is a relationship between the field of study and the level of interest in international news.
- H<sub>6</sub>: There is a relationship between the field of study and the choice of international news genre.

Political Activity refers to the engagement of university students in political processes, organisations, or activities. This involvement can take various forms, such as participating in protests, being a member of a political group, and donating to political causes. Participants reported their political activities by choosing several options. As previously mentioned, little is known about the influence of political activity on news consumption, making it essential to study this topic. Nevertheless, we can find research on young adults' political and news engagements. Some previous findings concluded that young adults are not engaged in political activities. However, Loader (2007) argues that it is possible that the instruments used to analyse political engagement are still traditional and do not accompany the changes in the world, namely the appearance of the Internet. Nevertheless, some authors who studied online political activity still concluded that university students lack political engagement (Kara, 2018). Thus,

- H<sub>7</sub>: There is a relationship between political activity and the level of interest in international news.
- H<sub>8</sub>: There is a relationship between political activity and the choice of international news genre.

Regarding the sub-research question - *Do students prefer traditional or digital media to access new information?* - traditional media is defined as conventional forms of mass communication and information dissemination that have been used for over a century. This research includes print media (journals and magazines), broadcast media (television, radio) and other non-digital platforms. In contrast, new media refers to modern forms of mass communication and information dissemination that rely on digital technologies and online

platforms that appeared with the Internet. This research includes news websites (cyberjournalism), social media platforms, podcasts, and other digital sources. As indicators, we will analyse students' news reading habits by assessing which traditional media and new media outlets these individuals use to access news and the characteristics of both media (nominal variables). Research on the influence of media sources on news consumption is of some amount. Most findings suggest that the Internet is the primary news source, followed by news websites or television (Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020). Nevertheless, some authors argue that the relationship between both media is complementary instead of substituting for each other (Espinar-Ruiz et al., 2020; Gueifão, 2014). Therefore, we have the following hypothesis:

- H<sub>9</sub>: There is a relationship between media preference and the level of interest in international news.

## **b. Research design**

The data-gathering instrument used for this study was an online survey. After gathering the results, the findings are presented in two chapters. The first chapter encompasses a descriptive analysis of students' characteristics and an understanding of their news consumption habits. The subsequent chapter involves quantitative analysis, including inferential tests such as Mann-Whitney U, Kruskal-Wallis, and Chi-Square that tested the previously mentioned hypotheses. The chapter also compares previous studies and reports to this dissertation data.

### **1. Online questionnaires**

The primary data collection method was an online survey administered via the Qualtrics program. SPSS software was employed to analyse the results using quantitative statistical methods. It allowed us to investigate the factors influencing news consumption.

Survey methods are frequently employed to analyse and investigate human behaviour (Ball, 2019). Online surveys offer advantages such as cost-effectiveness, time efficiency, and automation, eliminating the need for physical distribution and printing (Nayak, 2019; Ball, 2019; Dewaele, 2018). Surveys have an immediacy of data processing, allowing for prompt analysis (Pozzo et al., 2019). The user-friendly nature of online surveys enables various question types, such as checkboxes, multiple-choice, or linear scales (Ball, 2019; Nayak, 2019). Additionally, it grants access to a much larger and diverse population or, on the contrary, to a

specific target (Nayak, 2019; Pozzo et al., 2019; Dewaele, 2018). Besides, it ensures that each participant receives the questionnaire similarly (Ball, 2019).

Another characteristic is anonymity, which fosters honest responses, reducing the likelihood of bias due to participants wanting to please the researchers (Ball, 2019). In contrast, individuals can provide false information and duplicate responses (Ball, 2019; Dewaele, 2018).

One challenge is that surveys may suffer from self-selection bias and challenges in representativeness (Ligeiro, 2022; Ball, 2019; Nayak, 2019; Pozzo et al., 2019; Barbosa, 2019; Dewaele, 2018). This bias arises because participants may hold strong positive or negative opinions on the subject, leave some questions unanswered or replied randomly. While this bias does not invalidate the research, it requires careful interpretation (Dewaele, 2018). Factors such as lack of internet connection, disinterest in completing the questionnaire or overlooking emails or mobile notifications can result in insufficient response rates.

Another challenge is the inability to delve deeper into open-ended responses and seek clarification for ambiguity (Ball, 2019; Pozzo et al., 2019). Besides, achieving gender balance can be challenging, as female participants often predominate (Dewaele, 2018).

In addition, given that the questionnaire targeted both Portuguese and international students, it is crucial to address the language and translation of the survey. As a result, the latter was made available in Portuguese and English.

Another crucial issue was the sample size. How much was enough? It depends on many factors, such as the availability of participants, low response rate, time constraints, and human resources (Dewaele, 2018). Therefore, because of time constraints and the season available to answer the survey, that is, the beginning of university evaluations and close to Christmas, it was decided to collect answers during a month, starting November 21<sup>st</sup> and ending December 21<sup>st</sup>, 2023.

Regarding the survey distribution, it was a mix of a snowball effect with several messages sent. The distribution included personal contacts, social media, especially on Reddit, and the Survey Circle since this platform gave each person who answered the survey a redemption code. The code had no financial gain; it only gave points to make the other person's survey more visible. However, this research had a high risk of being biased on nationality and field of study since it resorted to sharing the survey with individuals who had been contacted in the past. Therefore, we could not generalise the data since we are dealing with a convenience sample.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections, with 22 questions total and a completion time of 8 minutes (Table 1). The answers were requested for the first three sections, meaning that answering was optional to continue through the survey. However, answering was compulsory for the last section since it included students' characteristics. The first section appeared after the initial message, which explained the purpose of the study, the target audience, and the anonymity.

**Table 1**

*Sections and indicators of the survey*

Section	Indicators
Frequency and Interest	Frequency of overall news consumption Frequency of engagement with international news Reasons lack of interest in international news Level of interest in international news International news topics
Factors	Frequency of news' engagement through domestic media Frequency of news' engagement through foreign media Frequency of encountering news culturally/geographically close to their country of origin Relevance of international news to academic field Political activities participation
Traditional and New Media	Traditional media sources Frequency of international news exposure via traditional media Traditional media' characteristics New media sources Frequency of international news exposure via new media New media' characteristics
Demographics	Gender Age Country of origin Field of study
Additional comments	

To sum up, the research methodology centres on an online questionnaire. This method, known for its cost-effectiveness, can be tailored to social researchers' needs of aiming to gather data on large populations too large for direct observation (Gueifão, 2014). However, online



questionnaires have limitations, such as low response rates and limited data depth. Hence, narrowing the focus and considering collaboration to enhance participation rates was crucial.

## 2. Statistical tests

This study used various statistical tests to investigate the relationships between different factors and their impact on the level of interest in international news and news topics. Non-parametrical tests were used given the high likelihood of the data not being normally distributed due to the ordinal characteristic of the level of interest and of the results coming from a survey. This decision followed verification of the non-normal data distribution.

Given the significance of the order of the ordinal variable is important, the Kruskal-Wallis test was used to examine statistically significant differences in interest levels among more than two independent groups. As an alternative, the Mann-Whitney  $U$  test was employed as a non-parametric option for comparing interest levels between only two independent nominal and ordinal groups (Calenda & Mosca, 2007). Additionally, Spearman's Rank test was used to analyse the association between two ordinal ranked variables, considering the presence of outliers and the non-normal data distribution.

The Chi-square test was used to observe a relationship between two nominal variables: the factors and the news topics. However, the Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact test (FFH) was used instead of the Chi-Square test when the contingency table was greater than 2x2 and more than one expected frequency was less than five.

Bayes Factor ( $BF_{01}$ ) was used to show the "ratio of the probability of the observed data given the alternative hypothesis to the probability of the observed data given the null hypothesis" (Field, 2018, p. 1682). That is, to provide evidence to support or not support the alternative hypothesis. In order to complement the analysis, an effect size (ES) was calculated using the Phi test for 2x2 contingency tables or the Cramer's  $V$  test for variables with more than two categories. The ES of the Spearman's Rank tests was calculated using the z-scores. The ES for the Kruskal-Wallis tests was calculated using the Epsilon-Squared formula ( $\epsilon_R^2$ ).

## RESULTS

As previously mentioned, an online questionnaire through Qualtrics was carried out for this research. The population consisted of university students from Portugal and other countries with diverse academic backgrounds. After closing the questionnaire, there were 316 responses. However, to ensure the highest quality data, answers with a response rate below 85% were eliminated, resulting in a sample of 270 individuals. This percentage indicates that at least three independent variables were answered, allowing for the testing of three hypothesis groups.

### Descriptive Analysis

Table 2 summarises the demographic profile of the university students. Of the 270 students, 62.6% were women, 35.9% were men, 1.1% chose the option “Prefer not to say”, and 0.4% were non-binary.

Most of the students from this sample were from European countries, with 177 Portuguese students (36 from other countries), followed by African students ( $n = 25$ ). The second most represented country was Guinea-Bissau, with 14 students, followed by 12 students from the United Kingdom (see Appendix A).

The most represented academic field was Social Sciences/Behavioural/Journalism, with 88 students, followed by Health students ( $n = 43$ ). The least represented fields of study were Social Services (such as sociocultural animation) and Personal Services (e.g., sports or tourism), with three students each.

Voting was the political activity most students participated in (78.5%), followed by Signing Petitions (53.3%) and Sharing or Commenting political information (35.9%). The least represented political activity was participating in a Parish/Municipal assembly (1.9%). Nevertheless, 13.7% of all students had not participated in any political activity.

**Table 2**

*Count and Percentage of Students' Characteristics*

Baseline Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	97	35.9%
Female	169	62.6%

Non-binary	1	0.4%
Prefer not to say	3	1.1%
Country of Origin		
Africa	25	9.3%
America	18	6.7%
Asia	12	4.5%
Europe	213	79.1%
Oceania	1	0.4%
Field of Study		
Agriculture / Environment	4	1.5%
Arts	7	2.6%
Business Sciences / Economics	25	9.3%
Education	4	1.5%
Engineering / Manufacturing / Architecture / Construction	17	6.3%
Health	43	16.1%
Humanities	16	6.0%
Law	11	4.2%
Sciences / Mathematics / Computer Science	26	9.7%
Social Sciences / Behavioural / Journalism	88	32.8%
Social Services	3	1.1%
Personal Services	3	1.1%
Other	21	7.8%
Political Activity		
Boycott Products	43	15.9%
Debates (online and/or in person)	42	15.6%
Donate to political causes	22	8.1%
Member of a political group	19	7.0%
Parish/Municipal assembly	5	1.9%
Protest/Demonstration	78	28.9%
Share and/or comment political information	97	35.9%
Sign Petitions	144	53.3%
Voting	212	78.5%
Other	15	5.6%
I have not participated in political activities	37	13.7%

*Note:* Nationality has one missing value and Field of Study has two missing values. Since students could choose more than one option for Political Activity, the total percentage of answers was 264,4% (n = 714).

## News Consumption

Analysing the overall news engagement of university students ( $Mdn = 2$ ), the majority, 40.5% ( $n = 109$ ), indicated a daily consumption pattern. A significant percentage of respondents, 31.2% ( $n = 84$ ), reported checking the news several times a day (Figure 1). In contrast, 34.1% ( $n = 92$ ) of students engaged with international news daily, and 20.0% ( $n = 54$ ) accessed it several times a day ( $Mdn = 2$ ). However, more students accessed international news more than once a week (21.5%,  $n = 58$ ) compared with seeing overall news with the same frequency (12.6%,  $n = 34$ ). In sum, while most respondents engaged with both types of news daily, there was a slightly higher percentage accessing general news daily than international news. Moreover, a noticeable proportion of students (5.2%,  $n = 14$ ) reported rarely following overall news compared to 8.9% ( $n = 24$ ) of students who reported rare international news consumption.

Furthermore, of the 2.2% ( $n = 6$ ) that did not engage with international news, 50% ( $n = 4$ ) attributed their disinterest to the sensationalist nature of the news content. Within this subgroup, three students were from Portugal and the other one was from Brazil. Additionally, reasons such as lack of trust in information and perceived lack of benefit were cited by Portuguese students, with language barriers and the absence of relevant content chosen by Angolan students (25% each,  $n = 1$ ).

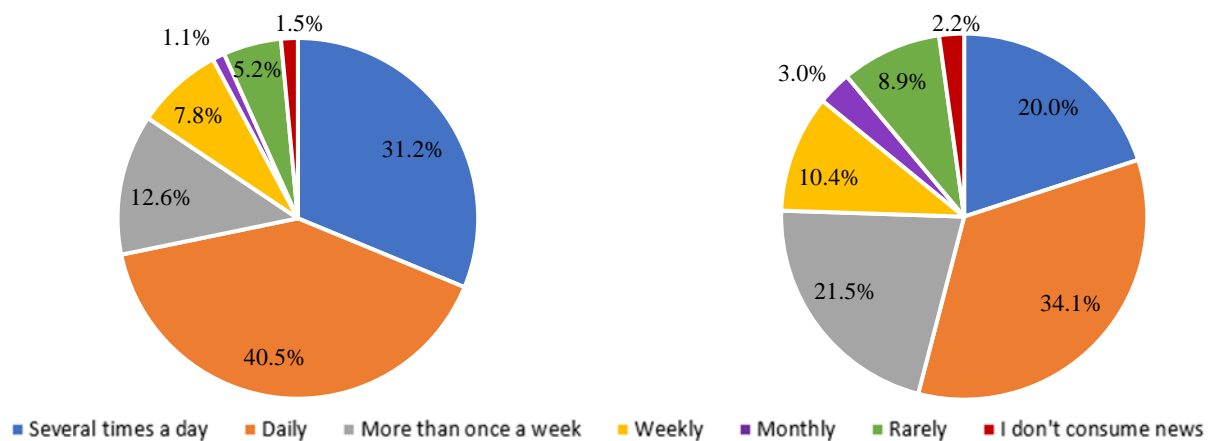


Figure 1. Percentage of News Engagement

Figure 2. Percentage of International News Engagement

Note: In Figures 1 and 2, the red colour indicates “I don’t consume news” and “I don’t consume International news”, respectively. It means that the value of 2.2% from the second figure may be perceived as the student interacting with overall news, but it does not do the same for international news.

The analysis of students' level of interest in news revealed a range of engagement, with the majority showing some degree of interest in it ( $Mdn = 5$ ). Notably, a significant proportion of respondents, 42.6% and 23.3%, respectively, were categorised as "Interested" and "Very Interested", indicating an active engagement with international news content (Table 3). In contrast, a smaller percentage expressed disinterest or slight disinterest, with only 12.3% of the sample being categorised as "Very Uninterested", "Disinterested", and "Slightly Disinterested".

**Table 3**

*Count and Percentage of Level of Interest in International News*

Level of Interest	n	%
Very Uninterested	10	3.7%
Disinterested	8	3.0%
Slightly Disinterested	15	5.6%
Slightly Interested	59	21.9%
Interested	115	42.6%
Very Interested	63	23.3%

There is a diverse range of news topics that students are interest in. Politics emerged as the most prominent news topic, with 15.2% of responses, followed closely by Entertainment (11.2%) and Culture (10.4%) (Table 4). Additionally, significant attention was directed towards topics such as Accidents and Disasters, Science and Technology, and Economy, each accounting for approximately 9-10% of responses. On the other hand, topics such as Careers and Fashion had comparatively lower interest rates, each representing less than 4% of the responses.

Moreover, when asked which news topic students preferred the most, the majority chose Politics, followed by Entertainment, 34.1% ( $n = 92$ ) and 15.6% ( $n = 42$ ), respectively (see Appendix B). Similar to the multiple-choice answers of news topics, issues such as Careers, Fashion, and Health had comparatively lower interest, each representing less than 3% of responses ( $n < 7$ ).

**Table 4***Count and Percentage of International News' Topics*

News Topics	n	%
Accidents and disasters	121	9.5%
Environment	103	8.1%
Careers	30	2.4%
Science and Technology	118	9.3%
Crime	84	6.6%
Culture	132	10.4%
Sport	97	7.6%
Economy	119	9.4%
Entertainment	142	11.2%
Fashion	41	3.2%
Politics	193	15.2%
Health	75	5.9%
Other	13	1.0%

*Note:* Since students could choose more than one option, the total percentage of answers was 469.6% (n = 1268).

Most students reported a positive level of news consumption, engaging with international news from national and international sources on a daily basis (*Mdn* = 2 and *Mdn* = 3, respectively). A significant proportion of respondents, 60.4% (n = 163), reported engaging with international news daily and several times a day through domestic media (Figure 3). In contrast, a smaller percentage, 44.0% (n = 119), indicated the same type of international news engagement through foreign media sources (Figure 4). These results suggest a higher reliance on domestic media to access international news among the surveyed students.

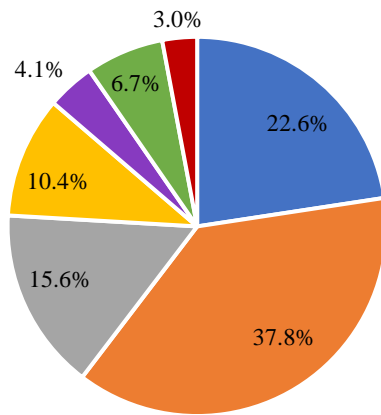


Figure 3. Percentage of International News Consumption via Domestic Media Channels

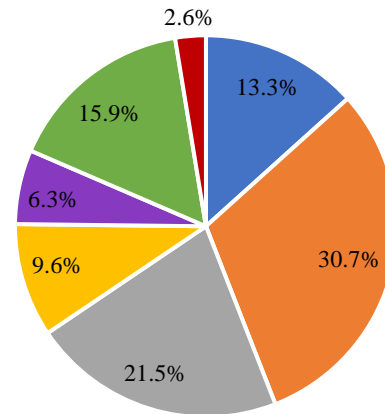


Figure 4. Percentage of International News Consumption via International Media Channels

■ Several times a day ■ Daily ■ More than once a week ■ Weekly ■ Monthly ■ Rarely ■ I don't consume international news

Furthermore, most students reported a regular encounter when asked about their exposure to news that was culturally or geographically close to each student's country of origin ( $Mdn = 3$ ). 42% ( $n = 113$ ) of the individuals indicated a daily occurrence, while 23.4% ( $n = 63$ ) reported exposure more than once a week. Only a small minority, comprising 1.0% of the respondents ( $n = 5$ ), did not access international news. These data suggest a somewhat strong connection between students' cultural/geographical identity and news consumption patterns.

Additionally, 84.4% ( $n = 227$ ) of the students concurred on the significance of international news in their academic fields (see Appendix C). Among them, 30.5% ( $n = 82$ ) expressed strong agreement, 29.7% ( $n = 80$ ) agreed, and 24.2% ( $n = 65$ ) partially agreed ( $Mdn = 5$ ). A smaller proportion of the sample held a different view (15.5%,  $n = 42$ ), with only 3.7% ( $n = 9$ ) indicating strong disagreement. These findings suggest the widespread acknowledgement of the importance of international news in shaping and enriching academic perspectives across diverse fields of study.

### News consumption through Traditional and New Media

Television was the most popular platform for news consumption in traditional media (42.8%). Radio and newspapers followed closely behind, at 16.0% and 14.2%, respectively. Magazines fell behind, capturing 4.8% of students' attention (Table 5).

On the other hand, in the new media field, social media took the lead, with 22.9% of respondents favouring non-traditional media profiles for news updates. Surprisingly, traditional media profiles on social media platforms also had a significant share (21.1%). Podcasts (10.3%) and search engines/browsers (14.1%) emerged as popular opportunities for accessing news content, indicating a variety of digital news access habits.

A comparison of the two sets of results revealed a dichotomy in media consumption preferences, with television remaining a reliable choice from traditional media and both traditional and non-traditional social media profiles dominating the new media sphere. Notably, traditional media outlets have adapted by offering content through digital means, with traditional media websites (12.2%) and apps (6.0%). However, social media's appeal for news dissemination is undeniable, as evidenced by its substantial presence in the new media landscape. Therefore, this data suggests a dynamic shift in how students access and engage with news content, with traditional and new media platforms competing for audience attention in an increasingly digital world.

Moreover, 11.0% of the participants reported abstaining from traditional media to stay informed, while a significantly smaller percentage (0.8%) indicated the same for new media. These results suggest greater reliance on new media platforms to access news content.



**Table 5***Count and Percentage of Traditional and New Media*

Media Platforms	n	%
Traditional Media		
Television	187	42.8%
Radio	70	16.0%
Newspapers	62	14.2%
Magazines	21	4.8%
Other	49	11.2%
Don't watch/read news through traditional media	48	11.0%
New Media		
Social media (non-traditional media profiles)	191	22.9%
Social media (traditional media profiles*)	176	21.1%
Traditional media Apps*	50	6.0%
Traditional media websites*	102	12.2%
Search engines/browsers to access websites	118	14.1%
Push Notifications (alerts, notifications)	50	6.0%
Newsletters (e-mail)	41	4.9%
Podcasts	86	10.3%
Other	14	1.7%
Don't watch/read news through the new media	7	0.8%

Note: \* (of television, newspapers, ...). Since students could choose multiple options, the total percentage of answers from Traditional Media was 161.9% (n = 437) and from New Media was 309.3% (n = 835).

It is evident from the interaction of both traditional ( $Mdn = 3$ ) and new media ( $Mdn = 2$ ) that a significant percentage of students engage with international news content on a daily basis: 33.1% (n = 89) and 38.1% (n = 103), respectively (Table 6). Another substantial group of students (19.0%, n = 51) reported doing so more than once a week using traditional media. However, a considerable proportion (30.0%, n = 81) of respondents reported engaging with new media several times a day, indicating faster access to information through digital channels.

The data indicate a preference for new media platforms, as daily engagement with news content (“Several times a day” and “Daily”) is higher among new media users: 46.5% (n = 125) for traditional media and 68.1% for new media (n = 184). However, traditional media still holds a considerable position, particularly among those who read news more than once a week, with 19.0% compared to 14.8% (n = 40) for new media. The findings suggest a diverse media

landscape in which traditional and new media play distinct yet complementary roles in shaping news consumption patterns. Nevertheless, 5.9% (n = 16) of the students reported not engaging with the news from traditional sources, and 1.5% (n = 4) reported doing so from new media, suggesting an increasing tendency to rely on online sources for timely information dissemination. Moreover, what about the characteristics of each media type?

**Table 6**  
*Percentage of Traditional and New Media Consumption for International News*

Media	Several times a day	Daily	More than once a week	Weekly	Monthly	Rarely	Don't access news
Traditional	13.4%	33.1%	19.0%	14.1%	4.8%	9.7%	5.9%
New	30.0%	38.1%	14.8%	8.5%	1.9%	5.2%	1.5%

*Note:* There is one Missing Case in Traditional Media, therefore the Valid Percent was used.

The data from Table 7 highlights varying preferences in traditional media consumption. Trust in the information was the most important factor among students (28.3%, n = 133). It is in contrast to the 14.2% (n = 106) of students who trust the news from the new media.

Accessibility was the dominant characteristic of the new media, with 26.8% (n = 200) of students emphasising its importance (Table 7). Students also value the diversity of news topics, which was the second most important characteristic for both traditional and new media, with 22.0% (n = 104) and 20.5% (n = 153) of the answers, respectively.

Once more, 8.5% (n = 40) of the individuals did not use traditional media for news consumption. In contrast, only a small proportion, 0.9% (n = 7), abstained from staying informed via new media platforms<sup>9</sup>. These results can suggest a shift from traditional news sources towards new digital sources.

<sup>9</sup> The value for not accessing news through new media is the same from Tables 5 and 7. However, the same cannot be said to the results from both tables in the same category for traditional, which have 48 and 40 respondents, respectively.

**Table 7***Percentage of the Traditional and New Media's Characteristics*

Characteristics	Traditional Media	New Media
Offline access	7.9%	
No clickbait	7.4%	
In-depth reporting	16.3%	
Taste for touch	3.8%	
Trust in information	28.2%	14.2%
Diversity of news topics	22.0%	20.5%
Low cost		13.2%
News tailored to your preferences		13.0%
Accessibility		26.8%
Interactivity		9.5%
Other reasons	5.9%	1.9%
Don't watch/read news via this media	8.5%	0.9%

*Note:* Since students could choose more than one option, the total percentage of answers from Traditional Media was 174.8% (n = 472) and from New Media was 276.7% (n = 747).

### **Inferential Statistics**

The reliability of the frequency of news consumption was tested by evaluating the engagement with overall and international news, international news access through each student's country's media and foreign media sources, news that was culturally or geographically closer to their home country, and both traditional and new media. The results showed that all these frequencies had high reliabilities, with Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.86$ .

The variable Level of Interest was found to be non-normally distributed, as confirmed by a Shapiro-Wilk's test ( $p < .001$ ) and visual inspections of its histograms (Figure 5), normal Q-Q plots, and boxplots. This non-normal distribution was expected given the ordinal nature of the variable, with skewness ( $z = -8.57$ ) and kurtosis ( $z = 5.78$ ) values exceeding the z-scores interval<sup>10</sup>. Consequently, the non-parametric tests previously mentioned were employed to assess relationships between variables.

<sup>10</sup> In a normally distributed sample, 95% of z-scores should lie between -1.96 and +1.96 (Field, 2018).

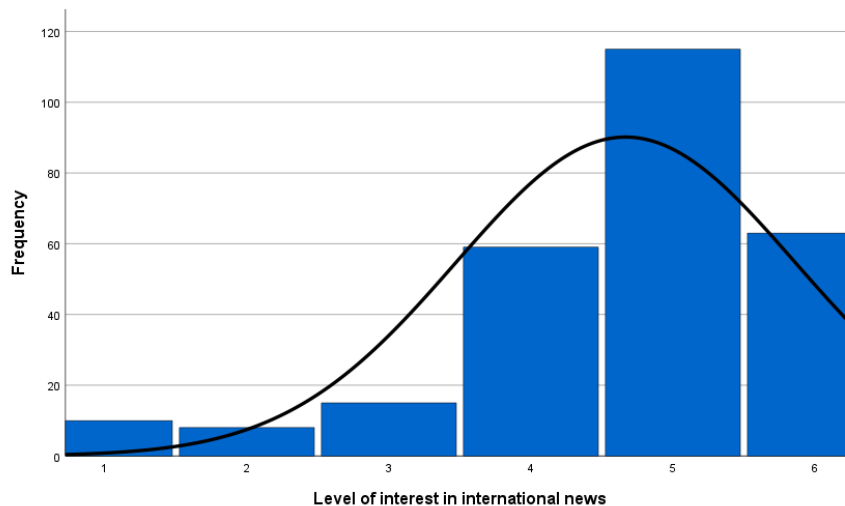


Figure 5. Distribution of number of students by Level of Interest

### Gender and its relationship with Level of Interest and News Topics

The observed frequencies revealed that the majority of male students expressed the category “Interested” in international news, 42.3% (n = 41), followed by 29.9% who were “Very Interested” (n = 29) (see Figure D1). Additionally, men had the highest level of disinterest, 7.2% (n = 7). In contrast, among female students, the distribution was more diverse. 88.7% of women (n = 150) expressed interest in international news. Specifically, 26.6% were “Slightly Interested” (n = 45), 42.0% were “Interested” (n = 71), and 20.1% were “Very Interested” (n = 34). Interestingly, analysing the overall disinterest of both women and men, women only had 11.3% (n = 19) compared to 14.5% (n = 14) from men. Due to the small sample size, it was challenging to draw meaningful conclusions about the interest in international news of non-binary and undisclosed gender individuals<sup>11</sup>.

In sum, the analysis revealed gender differences in the level of interest in international news. However, it is not possible to understand that gender influences the level of interest since there is no standard behaviour. Additionally, the category “Interested” shows very similar results from both male and female students. Therefore, there is a need for an inferential test. First, it is recommended to do a normality test for gender with the level of interest as the dependent variable because we have a categorical predictor variable. That is, from the start, we expect that there will be differences in the distribution of the level of interest among the gender

<sup>11</sup> The only non-binary student expressed a “Slightly Interested” level in international news. Of the respondents who preferred not to disclose their gender, two expressed interest and one was slightly interested in international news.

categories (Field, 2018). The visual inspection of their histograms, normal Q-Q plots and boxplots revealed that the Level of Interest was not normally distributed across male, female and non-disclosed gender students (see Figures D2, D3, D4 and D5). It had a skewness  $z = -5.97$  and kurtosis  $z = 3.35$  for the male students; skewness  $z = -5.53$  and kurtosis  $z = 3.80$  for the female students; and for undisclosed gender students, skewness  $z = -1.41$ , with no reported kurtosis<sup>12</sup>. Shapiro-Wilk tests obtained  $p < .001$  for all gender groups, indicating non-normality.

A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no significant differences in the interest levels in international news across gender categories,  $H(3) = 2.79$ ,  $p = .426 > .05$ ,  $\epsilon_R^2 = .01$ . Pairwise comparisons with adjusted  $p$ -values showed that there were no significant differences between the “Prefer not to say” gender individuals compared to female ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = .01$ ), male ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = .03$ ) or non-binary students ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = .02$ ). No significant differences were found between female and male students ( $p = .628$ ,  $r = .10$ ) and between women and non-binary individuals ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = -.02$ ). Finally, there were no significant differences between male and non-binary students ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = -.04$ ). The effect sizes were even too small. Therefore, we do not reject the  $H_0$ : “The level of interest in international news does not differ among the different gender groups”, meaning that the level of interest has the same distribution regardless of students’ gender.

The results of the FFH tests indicated that there was a significant association between gender and the following news topics: accidents and disasters, crime, sports, economy, entertainment, politics, and health ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 8). These results signify that there is significant evidence to reject the  $H_0$ : “There is no relationship between the two variables”. Only accidents and disasters, sports, economy, and politics presented substantial evidence to support the alternative hypothesis ( $3 < BF_{01} < 10$ ). Crime, entertainment and health showed scarcely evidence to support the alternative hypothesis ( $1 < BF_{01} < 3$ ). In addition, although the results were statistically significant, the variable was weakly associated with accidents, crime, entertainment and health ( $ES \leq 0.2$ ). Sports, economy and politics were strongly related to gender ( $0.2 < ES \leq 0.6$ ).

Post-hoc residuals analysis found that more male students than expected chose sports ( $z = 4.5$ ), economy ( $z = 2.9$ ), and politics ( $z = 3.3$ ). Conversely, fewer female students than expected opted for these topics. However, more women than expected chose accidents and disasters ( $z =$

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<sup>12</sup> Because of the small number of “Prefer not to say” and non-binary students, there is no kurtosis for both options and no skewness for the latter.

3.1), crime ( $z = 2.0$ ), entertainment ( $z = 2.5$ ), and health ( $z = 2.8$ ). Conversely, fewer men than expected opted for these topics.

**Table 8**

*Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact tests' results between Gender and News Topics*

News Topics	$p$	BF <sub>01</sub>	ES
Accidents and disasters	.005	8.33	.19
Environment	1.000	.07	.05
Careers	1.000	.02	.04
Science and Technology	.419	.22	.10
Crime	.048	1.33	.17
Culture	.209	.40	.12
Sports	< .001	4280.34	.29
Economy	.003	12.35	.20
Entertainment	.018	2.81	.17
Fashion	.184	.26	.14
Politics	< .001	47.62	.23
Health	.024	2.35	.18
Other	.297	.04	.10

Note:  $\alpha = .05$ .  $p$  is the  $p$ -value from the FFH test.

### **Nationality and its relationship with Level of Interest and News Topics**

As previously mentioned, the majority of students, 42% ( $n = 113$ ), reported regularly encountering news culturally or geographically close to their country of origin. However, is there a relationship between nationality and the level of interest in international news? In order to analyse such hypothesis, it was decided to divide the nationality into two groups: Portuguese students and International students. The reason was that there was a very high number of Portuguese individuals ( $n = 177$ ) compared to the number of International ones ( $n = 92$ ).

The analysis reveals that Portuguese students demonstrate a notably higher level of interest in global news than international students, with significant disparities, particularly in the “Interested” and “Slightly Interested” categories (see Figure E1). It is also possible to claim that Portuguese students have higher overall disinterest (6.3%,  $n = 17$ ) in international news than International students ( $n = 5.6\%$ ,  $n = 15$ ). Nevertheless, it is essential to note that when comparing the levels of interest within each group, International students had a higher percentage in the “Very Interested” category (30.4%,  $n = 28$ ) than the Portuguese (19.8%,  $n =$

35), which can also be explained because of the smaller sample number. However, when using the same approach, 16.2% (n = 15) of International students had a higher disinterest level than the Portuguese (9.6%, n = 17).

In sum, the analysis indicated that some nationality differences exist in the level of interest in international news. Therefore, there is a need for an inferential test. First, similar to gender, it is recommended to also do a normality test for nationality with the level of interest as the dependent variable because the variable is also a categorical predictor. Once more, the visual inspection of their histograms, normal Q-Q plots and boxplots showed that the Level of Interest was not normally distributed for both Portuguese and International students (see Figures E2 and E3). It had a skewness  $z = -6.90$  and kurtosis  $z = 6.54$  for the Portuguese students, and skewness  $z = -5.06$  and kurtosis  $z = 1.92$  for the International students. For both groups, the result of the Shapiro-Wilk test was  $p < .001$ , below the sig = .05 value. This result signifies that we reject the  $H_0$ : “Data is normally distributed”; hence, there was a need to do a non-parametric test.

The level of interest in Portuguese students did not differ significantly from that of International students:  $U = 8783.50$ ,  $z = 1.12$ ,  $p = .263$ ,  $r = .07$  (Figure 6). Since  $p > .05$  and the effect size is too small, we do not reject the  $H_0$ : “The distribution of Level of Interest in international news does not differ across the nationality categories”. In sum, the Mann-Whitney U test shows that nationality does not affect the level of interest in international news.

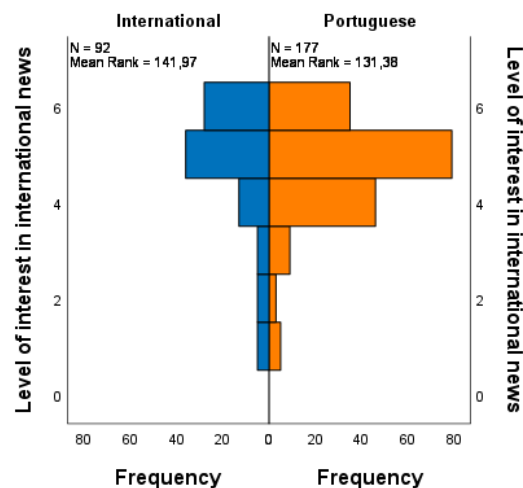


Figure 6. Mann-Witney U test result: Level of Interest by Portuguese and International students

To further prove the lack of effect of nationality on the level of interest, a Kruskal-Wallis test was conducted on the four nationality categories (African, American, Asian<sup>13</sup>, and European)<sup>14</sup>,  $H(3) = 4.54$ ,  $p = .209 > .05$ ,  $\epsilon_R^2 = .02$ . Pairwise comparisons with adjusted  $p$ -values showed that there were no significant differences between American and Asian ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = -.06$ ), African ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = .08$ ) or European students ( $p = .239$ ,  $r = -.13$ ). There were also no significant differences between Asian students compared to African students ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = .01$ ) and European ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = -.03$ ). Lastly, there was also no significant differences between African compared to European students ( $p = 1.00$ ,  $r = -.04$ ). Therefore, we prove again that we do not reject the  $H_0$ : “The distribution of level of interest in international news does not differ across the nationality categories”.

The results of the Chi-Square tests indicated that there was a significant association between nationality and entertainment and between nationality and political news ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 9). These results signify that there is significant evidence to reject the  $H_0$ : “There is no relationship between the two variables”. Both news topics presented strong evidence to support the alternative hypothesis ( $BF_{01} > 10$ ). Additionally, entertainment was strongly negatively associated with nationality, whereas political news was strongly positively related to nationality ( $0.2 < ES \leq 0.6$ ).

Post-hoc residuals analysis found that more Portuguese students than expected chose entertainment ( $z = 4.0$ ). Conversely, fewer International students than expected opted for this topic. However, more Internationals than expected chose political news ( $z = 3.8$ ). Conversely, fewer Portuguese than expected opted for this topic.

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<sup>13</sup> The one student from Oceania was placed in the Asian category because of the geographical proximity.

<sup>14</sup> Once again, histograms, normal Q-Q plots and boxplots showed that the Level of Interest was not normally distributed for African, Asian and European students (see Table E1 and Figure E4).



**Table 9***Chi-Square test's results between Nationality and News Topics*

News Topics	$\chi^2$	$p$	BF <sub>01</sub>	ES
Accidents and disasters	1.93	.164	.56	-.09
Environment	.54	.463	.27	.05
Careers	.27	.607	.15	-.03
Science and Technology	.01	.926	.21	-.01
Crime	.44	.507	.24	-.04
Culture	1.14	.287	.38	-.07
Sports	.34	.560	.24	-.04
Economy	2.96	.085	.93	.11
Entertainment	16.06	< .001	500.00	-.24
Fashion	3.23	.073	.77	-.11
Politics	14.38	< .001	333.33	.23
Health	1.10	.295	.33	-.06
Other		.378	.15	.06

Note:  $\alpha = .05$ .  $\chi^2$  is the value of the Chi-Square test.

### **Field of study and its relationship with Level of Interest and News Topics**

Most students (84.4%,  $n = 227$ ) agreed that international news is relevant to their field of study with 30.5% ( $n = 82$ ) strongly agreeing with that claim. Is there a difference between the importance of international news and their actual interest in it?

Some academic fields demonstrated a strong interest in international news, but others evoked more mixed responses, with varying engagement degrees across different interest levels (see Table F1). Notably, Social Sciences/Behavioural/Journalism emerged with the highest positive interest levels, with 29.8% ( $n = 80$ ) of students, followed by Health students, who have a percentage of 14.2% ( $n = 38$ ). Interestingly, Business Sciences/Economics and Sciences/Mathematics/Computer Science each have 8.2% ( $n = 22$ ) of students with positive interest levels. In contrast, Agriculture/Environment and Arts demonstrated less interest, with lower percentages of students expressing a positive interest in the news, each having 1.5% ( $n = 4$ ). Nevertheless, Social Sciences was the academic field with the most disinterested students ( $n = 8$ ), followed by Health ( $n = 5$ ).

Interestingly, 88.3% ( $n = 237$ ) of students reported having a positive interest in international news, compared to 84.4% ( $n = 227$ ) who reported that international news was important to their

academic field. In sum, the analysis indicated differences in the field of study regarding the level of interest in international news. Therefore, there is a need for an inferential test. First, similar to nationality, it is recommended to do a normality test with the level of interest as the dependent variable because the field of study is also a categorical predictor. Once more, the visual inspection of their histograms, normal Q-Q plots and boxplots showed that the Level of Interest was not normally distributed for seven categories: Agriculture, Economics, Social Sciences, Law, Engineering, Humanities, Health and Other (see Table F2 and Figure F1). However, Arts, Sciences, Education, Personal Services, and Social Services had normally distributed data.

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in the level of interest in international news across some academic fields, despite a small effect size,  $H(12) = 26.67$ ,  $p = .009 < .05$ ,  $\epsilon_R^2 = 0.10$ . Pairwise comparisons with  $p$ -values showed that 11 out of 78 comparisons were significantly different, namely Education students compared to Business Sciences ( $p = .030$ ,  $r = 5.21$ ), with Other fields ( $p = .030$ ,  $r = -5.30$ ), with Social Sciences ( $p = .010$ ,  $r = 5.90$ ) and with Law students ( $p = .013$ ,  $r = 6.52$ ). There were significant differences between Arts students compared to Humanities ( $p = .045$ ,  $r = -4.07$ ), Business Sciences ( $p = .021$ ,  $r = -4.41$ ), Social Sciences ( $p = .004$ ,  $r = -5.11$ ), Law students ( $p = .008$ ,  $r = -5.72$ ), and Other field ( $p = .021$ ,  $r = -4.50$ ). Lastly, there were significant differences between Health compared to Social Sciences ( $p = .001$ ,  $r = 2.64$ ) and Law students ( $p = .031$ ,  $r = 3.26$ ). All of these variables presented large effect sizes ( $r > .05$ ). Thus, we reject the  $H_0$ : “The distribution of level of interest in international news does not differ across the field of study categories”.

The results of the Chi-Square tests indicated that there was a significant association between the academic field and the following news topics: accidents and disasters, science and technology, culture, sports, politics, and health ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 10). These results signify that there is significant evidence to reject the  $H_0$ : “There is no relationship between the two variables”. Culture and health represented strong evidence to support the alternative hypothesis ( $BF_{01} > 10$ ). Accidents and disasters and sports presented substantial evidence to support the alternative hypothesis ( $3 < BF_{01} < 10$ ). However, even though the results were statistically significant for political news and science and technological news, both suggested more probability of supporting the null hypothesis ( $1 < BF_{01}$ ). Additionally, all six news topics were moderately associated with the academic field ( $0.2 < ES \leq 0.6$ ).

**Table 10***Chi-Square tests' results between Field of Study and News Topics*

News Topics	$\chi^2$	$p$	BF <sub>01</sub>	ES
Accidents and disasters	17.98	.006	5.88	.26
Environment	8.34	.214	.05	.18
Careers		.586	< .001	.14
Science and Technology	14.07	.029	.84	.23
Crime	10.71	.098	.08	.20
Culture	27.06	< .001	1000.00	.32
Sports	18.88	.004	5.99	.27
Economy	11.75	.068	.29	.21
Entertainment	2.65	.852	.003*	.10
Fashion	7.87	.248	.004*	.17
Politics	15.00	.020	.96	.24
Health	30.17	< .001	1000.00	.34
Other		.534	< .001	.14

*Note:*  $\alpha = .05$ . Agriculture was put in the “Other” category while Arts and Education were put in the Humanities field. Social, Personal and Security Services were put together with the Health field whereas Engineering/Manufacturing field joined the Sciences/Mathematics academic area, creating the worldwide-known STEM field. \*These results have an extra decimal place due to their low value.

Post-hoc residuals analysis found that more health students than expected chose accidents and disasters news ( $z = 3.5$ ). Conversely, fewer Humanities students than expected opted for this topic ( $z = -2.1$ ). More STEM students than expected chose scientific and technological news ( $z = 3.0$ ). Conversely, fewer Business/Economics students than expected opted for this topic ( $z = -2.1$ ). More Social Sciences and Humanities students than expected chose cultural news ( $z = 2.8$ ;  $z = 3.1$ , respectively), but fewer STEM students than expected opted for this topic ( $z = -2.1$ ). An additional post-hoc residuals analysis found that more Business/Economics students than expected chose sports news ( $z = 3.5$ ). Conversely, fewer Social Sciences students than expected opted for this topic ( $z = -2.1$ ). More Social Sciences students than expected chose political news ( $z = 3.2$ ). However, there were no significantly fewer students than expected for this topic. Lastly, more Health students than expected chose health news ( $z = 4.7$ ). Conversely, fewer Business/Economics students than expected opted for this topic ( $z = -2.8$ ).<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Although there is no statistically significant association between crime and the field of study, it is worth noting that a higher-than-expected number of Law students selected crime news ( $z = 2.4$ ).

### **Political Activities and their relationship with Level of Interest and News Topics**

The variable political activity was turned into a ranked ordinal one for analytical purposes. The crosstabulation analysis suggests that at lower levels of political activity index (0-2), the majority of students are categorised as either “Slightly Interested” or “Interested” (Table G1). As the political activity index reaches a higher quantity (3-5), the percentage of individuals categorized as “Interested” and “Very Interested” becomes dominant. Besides, the distribution of individuals classified as “Disinterested” and “Slightly Disinterested” remains low across all levels of the political activity index.

Similar to the field of study, it is recommended to do a normality test with the level of interest as the dependent variable because political activity is also a categorical predictor. Once more, the visual inspection of the scatter plot<sup>16</sup>, their histograms, normal Q-Q plots and boxplots showed that the level of interest was not normally distributed for seven categories: three political activities, four activities, five, six, seven, eight and nine political activities (Figure G1 and Table G2). However, zero political activities, one activity, and two activities had normally distributed data.

There was a medium, positive correlation between the level of interest in international news and the quantity of political activities ( $Mdn = 2$ ),  $r_s = .35$ , 95% BCa CI [.23, .46],  $p < .001$ . In other words, as the number of political activities increased, so did the level of interest in international news. This finding provides enough evidence to reject the  $H_0$ : “There is no correlation between the variables”.

A Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in interest levels in international news across some political activities, even though having a small effect size,  $H(9) = 35.99$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $\epsilon_R^2 = .13$ . Pairwise comparisons with adjusted  $p$ -values showed that four out of 45 comparisons were significantly different with small effect sizes, namely zero political activity compared to three activities ( $p = .017$ ,  $r = -.22$ ), four activities ( $p = .009$ ,  $r = -.23$ ), and to five activities ( $p = .001$ ,  $r = -.25$ ). There were also significant differences between one political activity and five activities ( $p = .047$ ,  $r = -.20$ ). Subsequently Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests were made in order to understand which political activities differed in the level of interest. In particular, eight out of the eleven types of activities had a negligible effect ( $r < .3$ ) in the level of interest in international news, namely signing-petitions ( $U = 10541.50$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $r = .15$ ),

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<sup>16</sup> The scatter plot showed that the points seem to be arranged in a dense, elongated cluster (see Figure G1). This pattern makes it challenging to draw a single straight line through the main cluster of points.

boycott products ( $U = 6587.50, p < .001, r = .23$ ), debates ( $U = 6273.00, p < .001, r = .20$ ), protest ( $U = 9939.50, p < .001, r = .27$ ), share/comment ( $U = 10736.00, p < .001, r = .24$ ), voting ( $U = 7130.00, p = .049, r = 0.12$ ), member political group ( $U = 3316.50, p = .003, r = .18$ ), and not participated in any ( $U = 2771.50, p < .001, r = -.22$ ).

The number of political activities differed significantly for the environmental, cultural, and political news ( $p < .05$ ) (Table 11). These results signify that there is significant evidence to reject the  $H_0$ : “The distribution of political activities is the same across the news topics categories”. These particular news topics had a medium effect size on political activities. In sum, the Mann-Whitney  $U$  test shows that political activities vary according to specific news topics, namely environment, culture and politics.

**Table 11**

*Mann-Whitney U tests’ results between Political Activities and News Topics*

News Topics	$U$	$p$	$r$
Accidents and disasters	9526.50	.415	.05
Environment	10901.00	< .001	.23
Careers	3619.00	.962	.003
Science and Technology	9451.50	.440	.05
Crime	8854.50	.074	.11
Culture	11591.50	< .001	.24
Sports	7813.50	.341	-.06
Economy	10083.00	.080	.11
Entertainment	10186.00	.082	.11
Fashion	4756.50	.891	.01
Politics	10527.50	< .001	.33
Health	7430.00	.835	.01
Other	1550.50	.657	-.03

*Note:*  $\alpha = .05$ .  $U$  is the result from Mann-Whitney U test.  $r$  is the effect size.

### **Media sources and their relationship with Level of Interest and News Topics**

Previous results revealed a dichotomy in media consumption preferences, with television remaining a reliable choice from traditional media and both traditional and non-traditional social media profiles dominating the new media sphere. Does the rise of social media overshadow traditional media in influencing interest in international news?

A crosstabulation revealed that, for both media, most students had a positive level of interest in the news (87.8%,  $n = 237$ ). The same percentage for both media leads one to believe that students' interest in news remains consistent independently of the media outlets. However, to confirm this claim, a statistical test is imperative<sup>17</sup>.

The level of interest in international news was not significantly related to the quantity of traditional media sources,  $r_s = .10$ , 95% BCa CI [-.02, .21],  $p = .094$ . Conversely, there was a small but significant correlation between the level of interest and the quantity of new media sources,  $r_s = .18$ , 95% BCa CI [.04, .30],  $p = .004$ . In other words, as the amount of new media engagement increased, so did the level of interest in international news., There was a need to analyse the z-score of these independent coefficients in order to assess whether the difference between these correlations was meaningful (Field, 2018). The z-score of the difference was -.86, corresponding to the z-score of .39 in the Normal Distribution Table, which is less than the .05 criterion z-score of 1.96. Hence, the correlation of the level of interest is not significantly different in traditional media and new media.

Post-hoc Mann-Whitney  $U$  tests revealed that the level of interest in international news differed significantly for traditional media apps (e.g., of newspapers),  $U = 6432.00$ ,  $z = 1.97$ ,  $p = .049$ ,  $r = .12$ ; and podcasts,  $U = 9132.50$ ,  $z = 2.15$ ,  $p = .031$ ,  $r = .13$ . Since  $p < .05$ , there is significant evidence to reject the  $H_0$ : "The distribution of level of interest in international news is the same across the media categories". In sum, the Mann-Whitney  $U$  test shows that media, in particular, new media, has a negligible effect on the level of interest in international news ( $r < .3$ )<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Scatter plots of both media with the variable Level of Interest showed that the points seem to be arranged in a dense, elongated cluster. This pattern makes it challenging to draw a single straight line through the main cluster of points.

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, despite the absence of statistical significance in the Spearman's rank test, the level of interest differed in two traditional media sources, namely for newspapers,  $U = 82255.00$ ,  $z = 3.53$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $r = .21$ ; and magazines,  $U = 3631.00$ ,  $z = 3.12$ ,  $p = .002$ ,  $r = .19$ . These media also had a negligible effect on the level of interest.

## DISCUSSION

This chapter includes a systematised understanding of the factors which influence the level of interest in international news as well as the choice of news topics of the university students, giving an additional interpretation to the results obtained, relating them to arguments presented in the introductory chapters. Additionally, it also mentions this study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

### **Influential factors and media consumption habits in university students**

Most students indicated a daily consumption pattern of overall and international news and a positive level of interest in the latter. These results go against Oppili and Padmanabhan's research (2023) and Huang's (2009) study on university students' news consumption and against studies that argue that young individuals are not interested in news. However, the most common reason for news avoidance was the sensationalist nature of the news content, followed by lack of trust in the information, language barriers and perceived absence of beneficial and relevant content. These results align with the findings of Newman et al. (2022) and Huang (2009), who also noted that, for younger audiences worldwide, the news is biased, untrustworthy and not beneficial. However, the most chosen reason from their study was that the news hurts their mood and that there is too much news about politics and COVID-19.

Concerning the main and sub-research questions - *Do factors such as gender, nationality, field of study and political activity influence university students' interest in international news nowadays? Do students prefer traditional or digital media to access new information?* - only students' academic field, political activities and new media consumption had a strong association with their level of interest in international news. That is, the data supported the hypotheses H<sub>5</sub>, H<sub>7</sub> and H<sub>9</sub>. These results underscore the importance of individual interests, behaviours, and media consumption habits. The influence of the academic field is shown in the studies by Head et al. (2019) and Head et al. (2018), which stated that the level of engagement in the news differs between particular academic areas. In fact, in this research, more than 80% of students acknowledge the importance of international news to their educational fields.

Similarly, individuals actively engaged in political activities are more interested in international events. This result aligns with previous studies, as politically engaged individuals tend to follow the news more closely (Bonaparte & Kumar, 2013). More than two-thirds of the students stated that they voted, followed by signing petitions and sharing or commenting

political information. In contrast, a small percentage did not participate in any political activity. This active engagement suggests that the students are not *disaffected* but rather *displaced* (Loader, 2007). Excluding voting, one of the traditional political activities, these individuals are performing other more recent and deinstitutionalised forms of political engagement (Loader, 2007). In addition, the traditional political activities of belonging to a party and participating in a political meeting are two of the least executed behaviours by university students.

Regarding media power, social media was the most chosen media outlet by students. Nevertheless, television was the third most chosen option, suggesting a diverse and modern media landscape in which traditional and new media play distinct yet complementary roles in shaping news consumption patterns. These results are consistent with the research on university students by Espinar-Ruiz et al. (2020), Barbosa (2019), Head et al. (2018), Silveira and Amaral (2018), Antunovic et al. (2016) and Lopes (2014). However, there is an increasing tendency to rely on online sources for timely information dissemination since there are more students who do not engage with traditional media than with the new media. Besides, as Espinar-Ruiz et al. (2020) argued, there is still a separation between preference and degree of trust since students opted to trust more on traditional media sources rather than new media, even though outlets with the Internet are their primary news source.

The influence of new media suggests that digital platforms play a significant role in shaping students' exposure to and engagement with international news content. This media provides access to diverse sources and perspectives that may not be readily available through traditional media outlets. This aligns with this research's most chosen new media characteristic: accessibility. Nevertheless, we have to consider that this study's sample consists of social and digital natives who grew up in the social and participatory web era (Newman et al., 2022). These individuals are, therefore, typically more comfortable with digital technology and can have incidental exposure to news when using new media to communicate with friends and family, for example (Ligeiro, 2022; Peters et al., 2021; Antunovic et al., 2016).

It can be argued that the effect of traditional media apps on the level of interest in international news results from the trust in traditional media sources, but in digital format - also shown by previous data (Newman et al., 2022). However, the almost non-significant result can be derived from the fact that news websites ask for personal details, a practice people are not comfortable with, besides having to pay to access news (Van Dijk, 2005; Newman et al., 2022). In addition, the current economic crisis and recent inflation across numerous countries led the



audience to stop paying for news and adapt to other free sources instead (Newman et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2022).

Regarding Podcasts' influence on the level of interest, Pinto-Martinho et al. (2023, as cited in Newman et al., 2023) mention that their unrestricted availability and low cost for journalists are two reasons for their popularity. In recent years, there has been a notable rise in audio news engagement, particularly among younger audiences (Newman et al., 2023). However, the use of podcasts varies from country to country, posing a challenge in effectively categorising this recent media format.

Lastly, the results did not support the hypotheses H<sub>1</sub> and H<sub>3</sub>. For the first hypothesis, the lack of influence of gender on the level of interest in international news raises intriguing questions since some studies concluded that self-declared interest in news was lower amongst women (Newman et al., 2023; Sui et al., 2022; Newman, 2012). Besides, regarding the third hypothesis, the lack of difference in the levels of interest between the different nationalities may be due to cultural globalisation and the interconnected nature of today's world, which blur national boundaries, leading individuals from diverse backgrounds to share common interests and concerns regarding international affairs.

Moreover, all four sociodemographic (gender and nationality) and social (field of study and political engagement) variables were strongly associated with specific news topics. In other words, the results supported the hypotheses H<sub>2</sub>, H<sub>4</sub>, H<sub>6</sub> and H<sub>8</sub>. Regarding gender results, these research findings align with prior studies by Zhang (2021) and Kaspar and Fuchs (2021), which found that men tended to show greater interest in politics and sports. However, the results contradict findings from Hargrove and Stempel III (2002) and Zhang (2021) regarding women's engagement with political news and economic news, respectively. It was also verified that men were the biggest consumers of financial news, as demonstrated in Kaspar and Fuchs' (2021) and Sui et al.' (2022) studies. Additionally, female students were more interested in news about accidents and disasters, and crime, similar to Kaspar and Fuchs' results (2021) but contrary to Zhang's study (2021). Lastly, no significant gender differences were found in the technology topic, which opposes Zhang (2021) and Kaspar and Fuchs' research (2021). Besides, the results of more women than expected chose entertainment and health news. This trend aligns with the stereotypically feminine genres and reproduces the ongoing influence of societal norms and expectations on individuals' media preferences (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Boydston, 2013).

Several explanations could be helpful to try to understand these results. Firstly, we can mention the societal norms which defend sports news and other “hard news” are for men, and entertainment, health and other “soft news” are for women (Kaspar & Fuchs, 2021; Hanitzsch et al., 2019; Boydston, 2013). Secondly, it could be because women are more risk-averse (Hughes, 2023; Byrnes et al., 1999). Many authors have been interested in studying why women are the most prevalent audience of crime podcasts and television shows (Anthony, 2023; Sales, 2023). Some studies suggest that women identify with the victims of violent crimes since they are typically the victims of intimate, violent crimes (News Center - University at Buffalo, 2023; Anthony, 2023; Sales, 2023 Hughes, 2023). Addressing their fears of gendered violence and preparing to avoid those types of situations is one of the most defended reasons for the high female rate audience in crime shows. Lastly, as the WHO wrote, gender intersects with other factors; in this case, it can be related to academic field. Upon looking at the gender distribution by academic field, it was noted that most students from the Health field were women. This result may explain the prevalence of the female audience in the topics of accidents and disasters, for example, which in turn may influence the interpretation of the results.

Regarding nationality, more Portuguese students than expected chose entertainment<sup>19</sup>, whereas more International students chose political news. Although these two topics were the most preferred by the students, other explanations may be needed. The influence of political polarisation on news preferences is an important factor. For instance, individuals from countries with more political polarisation and turmoil, such as the U.S., tend to engage more with political news than Portugal, which has low political polarisation<sup>20</sup> (Newman et al., 2023; Newman et al., 2022; Santana-Pereira, 2016; Dimock et al., 2014). According to Fidalgo (2021), this lack of (or fragile) independent social dynamics - civic engagement - can be explained by the democracy’s relatively recent triumph in Portugal. This achievement followed a lengthy era of dictatorship and isolation from the outside world, thus contributing to the strong presence of a centralised state. Besides, a study by Costa et al. (2022) found that Portuguese youth were less interested in some types of involvement than their European counterparts. However, that was not a unique attribute of Portuguese youth, but instead of the Portuguese as a whole. In addition, European media tend to cover hard news more extensively and frequently, contrary to the

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<sup>19</sup> Individuals under 35 years old are more likely to be interested in entertainment news (Newman et al., 2022).

<sup>20</sup> Before Portugal’s recent elections on March 2024.

broadcast news programming, namely from the U.S., which aims more at entertainment than education (Iyengard et al., 2010).

Additionally, Fidalgo (2021) mentions other justifications for the low visibility of Portuguese news channels. First, the small size of the country and its population are associated with a low rate of news media engagement. Second, its economic weakness leads to low purchasing power for consumers (Newman et al., 2023). The Portuguese media industry worsened after the 2008 financial crisis, the Coronavirus pandemic, and current price inflation. Lastly, the low views of Portuguese news channels are also due to a fixed, controlled environment instead of showing what the audience likes.

Meanwhile, Pacheco (2014) addresses the media coverage of one Portuguese newspaper (at the time, it was not a news channel) - *Correio da Manhã* - regarding a specific international conflict, the Syrian war. According to the findings, a tabloid newspaper invests little or nothing in covering an international conflict, regardless of its relevance (Pacheco, 2014, p.98). The journal only mentioned news from other news sources, namely from those who are elite and, according to the author, have a biased view. It then concludes by arguing that these kinds of broadcasts have little prominence independently of the relevance of international news. Additionally, news values from the Portuguese popular press could also justify the high attention given to entertainment. It is characterised by topics such as entertainment and crime, although politics and economy are not so peripheral (Valadares, 2013).

Health students were more inclined towards accidents and disasters as well as health news, while Humanities students were more interested in cultural news. STEM students preferred scientific and technological news, and Social Science students were considerably inclined towards political news. These findings reflect the expected preference for topics aligned with their academic focus and the importance of being well-informed of advancements and developments in their respective fields. Besides, the results from the Humanities students follow Lopes' data (2014). Additionally, while entertainment was the second most chosen news topic in this research, for Lopes's study (2014) was ranked last. In other words, this study suggests that individuals may seek news content that aligns with their academic interests or reflects their professional aspirations. It also raises questions about the role of disciplinary identities in shaping and reinforcing news consumption among students (Smart et al., 2006).

The number of political activities differed significantly regarding environmental, cultural, and political news. The significant difference in political activity levels concerning

environmental news could indicate that more politically active individuals are also more likely to be engaged with environmental issues. For instance, these people may be advocating for policy changes or participating in environmental protests. In particular, Newman et al. (2022) and Hase et al. (2021) mention the increasing attention to climate change as a news topic, which is also more politically polarised in some countries than others.

Similarly, there was a difference in political activity levels concerning cultural news. First, it is essential to define culture. It is a broad term, and it depends on the context. We can mention national cultures, organisational cultures, and cultures of shared social practices, such as the cultures of consumption (Hanusch, 2013). In particular, Anthropology has a long history of studying this concept, especially when Sir Edward Burnett Tylor defined culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Street, 2024). Hence, what is the definition of culture for the students who answered this survey? Since the definition was not given in the survey, one can suppose that culture may have two definitions: the customary beliefs, social forms and traits of a group or the aesthetic creations of artists. Relating the first definition to political activity, cultural news often intersects with politics, reflecting societal values, norms, and debates. It may signify that students are interested in societal issues and injustices or in foreign cultures and that it may influence their political engagement. If we choose the second definition, it may signify that students are interested in artists who use their work for political expression and social change, for example (Mouffe, 2007).

Furthermore, while it is expected that individuals with higher political activity levels would be more interested in political news, this result could indicate that those actively involved in political activities are not just interested in consuming political news but actively seeking out information, and engaging with political discourse. This finding underscores the role of politically active individuals in informing themselves and engaging with political news media (Bonaparte & Kumar, 2013; Ashley et al., 2017; Kruikemeier & Sheata, 2017).

### **Limitations and Further remarks**

It is crucial to consider the interplay of gender, nationality, field of study, political engagement and media outlets, as they can influence one another. In this research, relationships between factors were not tested. As previously mentioned, most students from the Health field were women, which may explain the prevalence of the female audience in the topics of accidents and

disasters. For example, some studies addressed the influence of academic fields on social-political attitudes and worldviews (Haley & Sidanius, 2005; Kimmelmeier et al., 2005). Besides, gender or other personal characteristics can influence the academic field (Pike, 2006). Also, numerous studies addressed the media's influence on political participation (Ashley et al., 2017; Kruikemeier & Sheata, 2017; Hao et al., 2014; Newman, 2012).

Methodologically, there are several limitations to consider. Firstly, the study's findings are based on a convenience sample and a small sample size, which restricts their generalisability to the broader population. Besides, achieving gender balance was not possible, as female participants predominated in the sample, as argued by Dewaele (2018). Secondly, the placement of demographic characteristics at the end of the survey contributed to many incomplete surveys and missing values, thereby hindering the performance and results of the statistical tests. Thirdly, using a complementary data-gathering instrument, such as an interview, could have provided a more in-depth understanding of some results from the online survey (Ball, 2019; Pozzo et al., 2019). For instance, it could have revealed the underlying motivations behind students' news topic preferences. However, it was difficult to gather further observations due to time constraints, the need for anonymity, and a high response rate.

Additionally, this research did not explore how students define news and diverse news topics, such as "cultural news", nor define them in the questionnaire. As previously mentioned, the ambiguity of the term "culture", for example, may have led to varied interpretations among respondents, affecting the consistency and reliability of the data. Moreover, we have to consider that this study's sample consisted of social and digital natives, a term used to describe individuals who grew up in the social, participatory web and in the information age (Newman et al., 2022). These people are typically more comfortable with digital technology and social media, which could influence their preference for new media outlets.

Non-parametric tests, while less powerful than parametric tests, are still valuable research tools. They "may be less sensitive in detecting a relationship or a difference among groups" (Pallant, 2016, p.133). However, given the ordinal ranked variable named Level of Interest in international news, which was in five out of nine hypotheses, and due to the nominal nature of the other variables, these non-parametric tests seemed the best option to test the hypothesis.

Finally, further investigation is crucial to establish a comprehensive database on the influence of university students' characteristics on news consumption, particularly on the impact of their field of study and political engagement. Future research should also consider

larger and more diverse samples. Complementary data collection methods, such as interviews, can provide valuable insights into the reasons behind students' news choices. Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the unexpected preference of Business/Economics students for sports news. It could suggest a desire for leisure as a break from their academic pursuits or politics, for example (Agbolabori, 2018; Bonaparte & Kumar, 2013). Lastly, Portuguese students' greater attention to entertainment news could be a basis for future research.

## CONCLUSION

In an increasingly globalised world, international news engagement is crucial to understanding how personal characteristics can influence its consumption and how media can influence people's actions. Young adults, particularly university students, are among the groups who grew up in this new participatory web and information age, and are at a significant moment in their lives, characterised by the construction of their identities.

This interdisciplinary study has uncovered significant insights into the complex interplay of factors shaping university students' interest in international news and their choice of news topics. The findings emphasised the impact of the academic field, political engagement, and new media outlets on students' engagement with international affairs. Notably, students from different fields of study exhibited varying interest levels in international news. Moreover, politically engaged individuals demonstrated an enhanced interest in worldwide events.

New media, particularly traditional media apps and podcasts, also influenced students' news consumption. These results underline the predominance of new media in news habits compared to traditional media. Challenges such as privacy concerns and economic constraints associated with the easy accessibility of new media present barriers to traditional media outlets. Nevertheless, there is still a separation between preference and degree of trust since students opt to trust more on traditional media sources than new media.

Furthermore, this research also approached the relationship between sociodemographic and social characteristics in the choice of news topics. Gender, nationality, academic field, and political engagement significantly influenced students' choice of news genres, reflecting the diverse interests and perspectives within the student population. Regarding gender, there was a strong association between women and stereotypically feminine news topics, such as entertainment and health, and between men and politics and sports. However, we also need to consider the intersectionality with the academic field since the majority of the students from the Health field were women.

Portuguese students paid greater attention to entertainment news, whereas International students were more interested in politics. Reasons such as Portugal's low political polarisation, its democracy's relatively recent triumph or the economic crisis could help explain these results. Moreover, the academic field's findings reflect the expected preference for topics aligned with students' fields of study. Additionally, the results from political engagement showed that young adults are politically engaged, especially through non-traditional activities. Besides, the

relationship between this variable and the environmental, cultural, and political news topics shows that those actively involved in political activities are interested in consuming these types of political news.

Addressing the limitations, it is important to note that non-parametric tests challenged the study's robustness. This research did not test the relationships between factors, data that might have shown interesting results. Besides, to make the data more reliable, a brief definition of some concepts in the survey could have prevented possible several interpretations from respondents. Nevertheless, although the results cannot be extrapolated to all young university students, this study presents valuable insights gained from this study.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the multifaceted factors shaping university students' engagement with international news. By analysing the news situational factors and visual properties through the Framing theory and the psychological antecedents of the Uses and Gratifications model, this study revealed the influence of gender, nationality, academic field, political engagement, and of the media outlets. These findings provide valuable insights for researchers, educators, policymakers, and media organisations. They could inspire strategies to promote global awareness and informed citizenship among the next generation of leaders in an increasingly interconnected world.



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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A

#### *Count and Percentage of Students' Countries*

Country	n	%
Angola	5	1.9%
Belgium	1	.4%
Brazil	9	3,3%
Bulgaria	1	.4%
Canada	1	.4%
Cape Verde	2	.7%
China	1	.4%
Colombia	1	.4%
Croatia	2	.7%
Denmark	2	.7%
Egypt	1	.4%
Germany	3	1.1%
Guinea-Bissau	14	5.2%
Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	1	.4%
Hungary	1	.4%
India	6	2.2%
Iraq	1	.4%
Italy	2	.7%
Kazakhstan	1	.4%
Malta	1	.4%
Mozambique	1	.4%
Netherlands	1	.4%
New Zealand	1	.4%
Poland	1	.4%
Portugal	177	65.8%
Romania	2	.7%
Russian Federation	2	.7%
Rwanda	1	.4%
Sao Tome and Principe	1	.4%
Saudi Arabia	1	.4%
Slovenia	1	.4%
Spain	1	.4%
Sweden	2	.7%

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Switzerland	1	.4%
Turkey	1	.4%
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	12	4.5%
United States of America	6	2.2%
Uruguay	1	.4%
Total	269	100.0%

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*Note:* There is a missing case; therefore, the valid Percentage was used.

## Appendix B

### *Most preferred News Topic*

News Topics	n	%
Accidents and disasters	13	4.8
Environment	13	4.8
Careers	4	1.5
Science and Technology	21	7.8
Crime	10	3.7
Culture	22	8.1
Sport	22	8.1
Economy	19	7.0
Entertainment	42	15.6
Fashion	6	2.2
Politics	92	34.1
Health	5	1.9
Other	1	.4
Total	270	100.0

## Appendix C

### *Count and Percentage of Relevance of International News to Academic Fields*

Level of Agreement	n	%
Strongly disagree	10	3.7%
Disagree	16	5.9%
Slightly disagree	16	5.9%
Partially agree	65	24.2%
Agree	80	29.7%
Strongly agree	82	30.5%

*Note:* There is one Missing Case. Therefore, the Valid Percentage was used (without the Missing Case).

## Appendix D

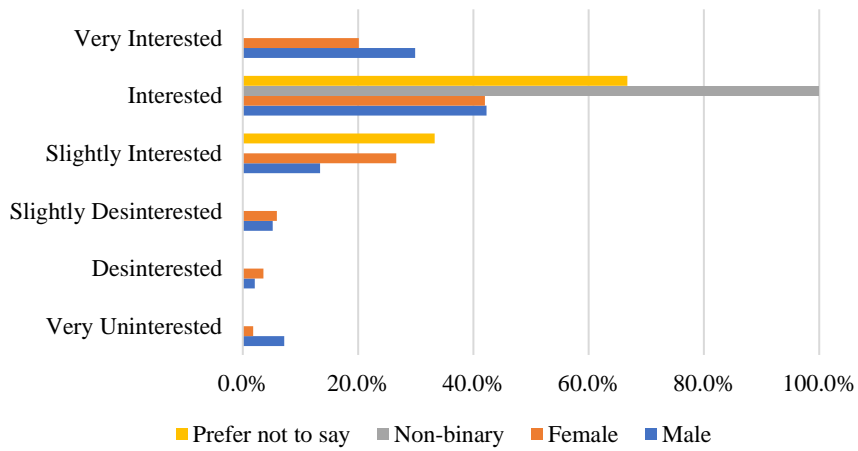


Figure D1. Percentage of the Level of Interest in International News by Gender

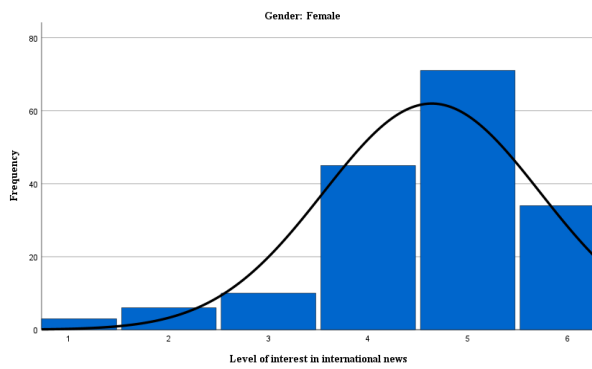


Figure D2. Normality Test Histogram (Female)

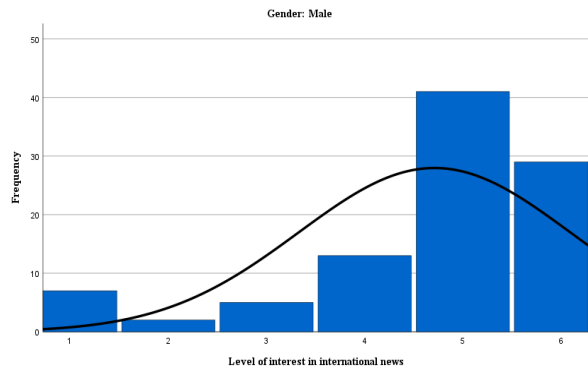


Figure D3. Normality Test Histogram (Male)

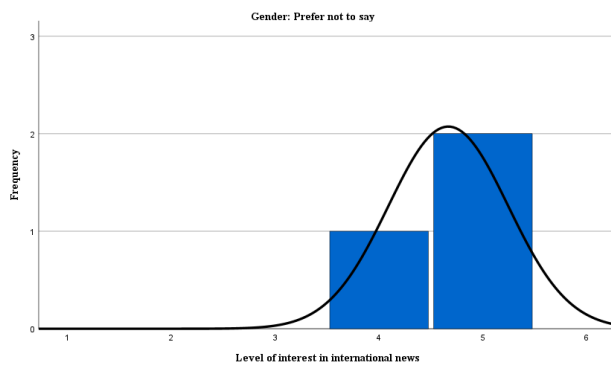


Figure D4. Normality Test Histogram (Prefer not to say)

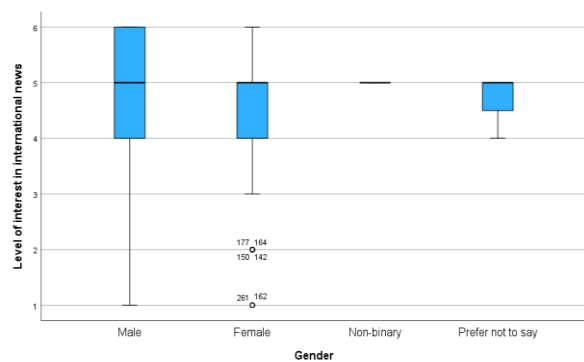


Figure D5. Gender Normality Test Boxplot

## Appendix E

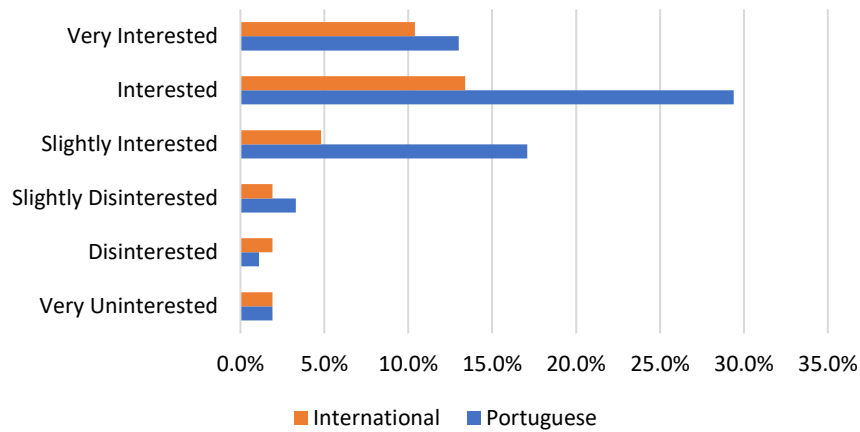


Figure E1. Level of Interest in International News by Portuguese and International Students (%)

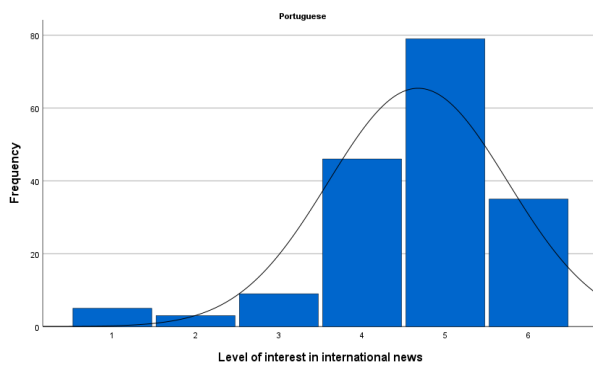


Figure E2. Normality Test Histogram (Portuguese)

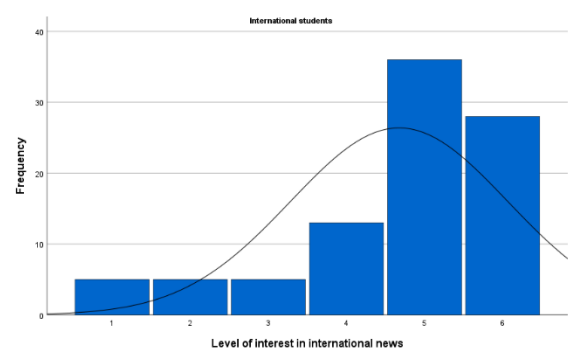


Figure E3. Normality Test Histogram (International)

**Table E1**

*Results of the Continents' Normality Test*

Continents	z-scores	Shapiro-Wilk
Africa	s = -1.91 k = -.72	$p < .001$
America	s = -1.18 k = -.25	$p = .032$
Asia	s = -0.77 k = -.66	$p = .131$
Europe	s = -6.41 k = 10.27	$p < .001$



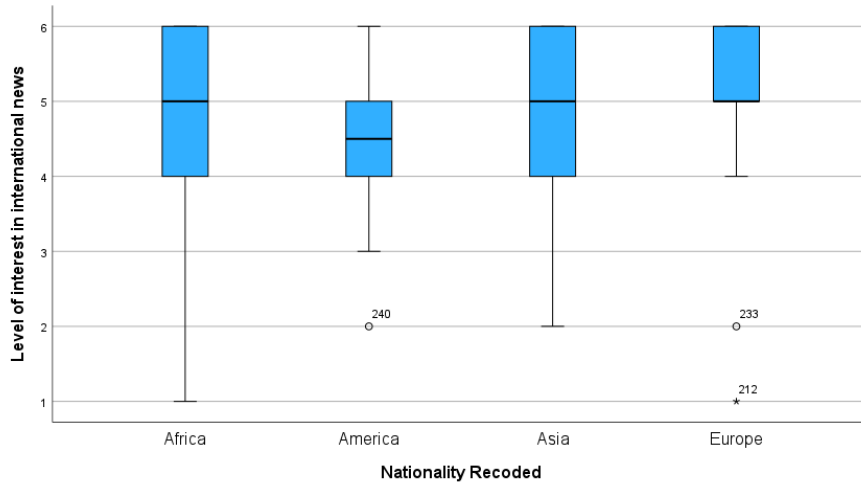


Figure E4. Continents' Normality Test Boxplot

## Appendix F

**Table F1**

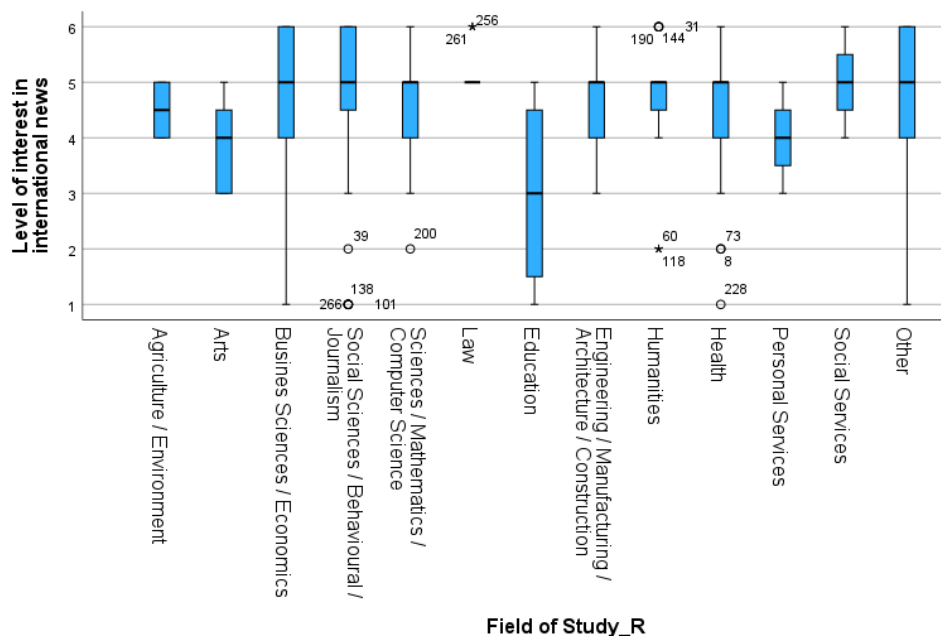
*Percentage of the Level of Interest in international news by Field of Study*

Field of study	Very Uninterested	Disinterested	Slightly Disinterested	Slightly Interested	Interested	Very Interested
Agriculture	.0%	.0%	.0%	.7%	.7%	.0%
Arts	.0%	.0%	1.1%	.7%	.7%	.0%
Economics	.7%	.0%	.4%	1.5%	4.1%	2.6%
Social Sciences	1.9%	.4%	.7%	5.2%	12.7%	11.9%
Sciences	.0%	.4%	1.1%	2.2%	4.1%	1.9%
Law	.0%	.0%	.0%	.0%	3.4%	.7%
Education	.4%	.4%	.0%	.4%	.4%	.0%
Engineering	.0%	.0%	.4%	2.6%	2.2%	1.1%
Humanities	.0%	.7%	.0%	.7%	3.4%	1.1%
Health	.4%	.7%	.7%	5.6%	7.1%	1.5%
Personal Services	.0%	.0%	.4%	.4%	.4%	.0%
Social Services	.0%	.0%	.0%	.4%	.4%	.4%
Other	.4%	.0%	.4%	1.5%	3.4%	2.2%

**Table F2**

*Results of the Fields of Study' Normality Test*

Field of Study	z-scores	Shapiro-Wilk
Agriculture / Environment	s = 0 k = -2.29	p = .024
Arts	s = .44 k = -1.14	p = .062
Business Sciences / Economics	s = -3.60 k = 3.15	p < .001
Social Sciences / Behavioural / Journalism	s = -6.61 k = 5.76	p < .001
Sciences / Mathematics / Computer Science	s = -1.43 k = .09	p = .009
Law	s = 2.91 k = 1.59	p < .001
Education	s = 0 k = -1.26	p = .714
Engineering / Manufacturing / Architecture / Construction	s = .27 k = -.53	p = .026
Humanities	s = -2.56 k = 1.69	p < .001
Health	s = -3.30 k = 3.07	p < .001
Personal Services	s = 0 k = -2.29	p = .024
Social Services	s = 0 k = —	p = 1.000
Other	s = -3.32 k = 4.03	p < .001



*Figure F1. Fields of Study' Normality Test Boxplot*

## Appendix G

**Table G1**

*Crosstabulation: Political Activity Index with Level of Interest*

Political Activity Index	Very Uninterested	Disinterested	Slightly Disinterested	Slightly Interested	Interested	Very Interested
0 Activities	5	2	6	7	6	5
1 Activity	2	4	3	18	25	7
2 Activities	0	2	3	17	31	11
3 Activities	1	0	1	9	21	12
4 Activities	1	0	1	4	14	10
5 Activities	0	0	0	3	13	9
6 Activities	0	0	1	1	3	5
7 Activities	0	0	0	0	1	3
8 Activities	1	0	0	0	0	1
9 Activities	0	0	0	0	1	0

**Table G2**

*Results of the Political Activities' Normality Test*

Political Activity Grouped	z-scores	Shapiro-Wilk
0 Activities	s = -.71 k = 1.14	p = .013
1 Activity	s = -3.51 k = 1.89	p < .001
2 Activities	s = 2.70 k = 1.89	p < .001
3 Activities	s = -4.48 k = 7.06	p < .001
4 Activities	s = -4.50 k = 6.59	p < .001
5 Activities	s = -.65 k = -.68	p < .001
6 Activities	s = -1.81 k = .71	p = .011
7 Activities	s = -1.97 k = 1.53	p = .001

*Note:* The level of interest in international news is constant for 8 and 9 political activities, which have been omitted.

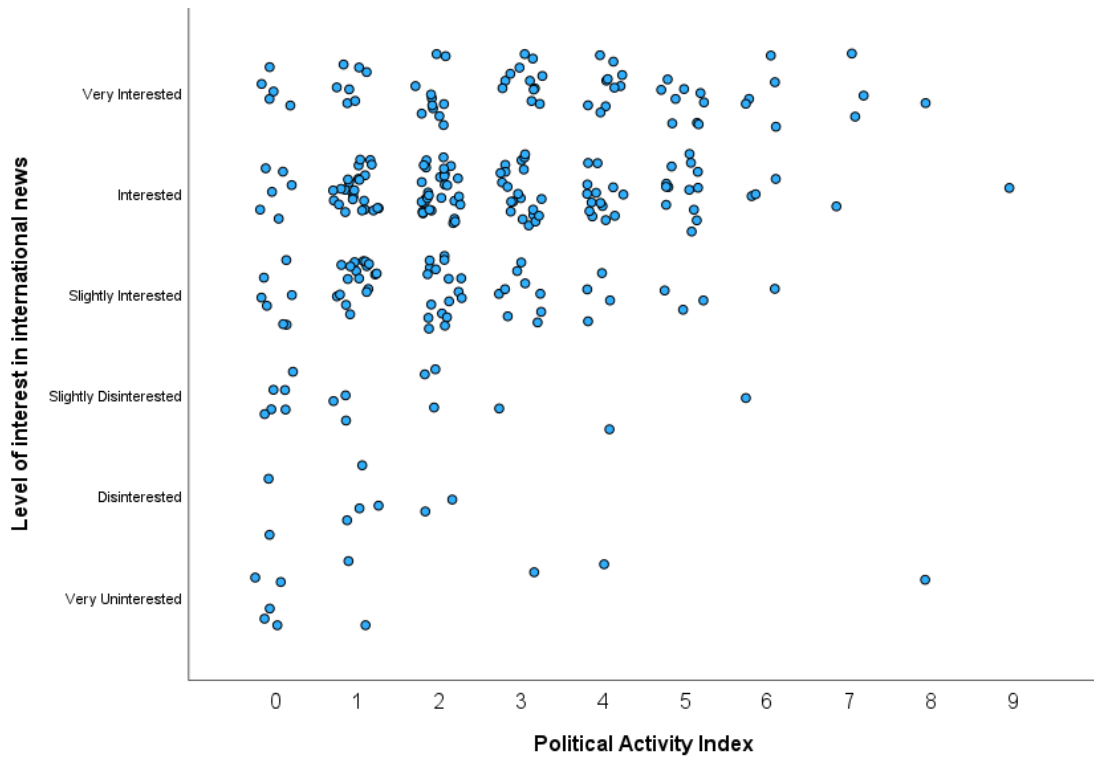


Figure G1. Scatter Plot of Level of Interest in international news by Political Activity

## Appendix H

### Survey by Questionnaire: International news consumption

Hello! I'm a fellow student doing a Master's thesis concerning students' interest in International News. Your answer is vital to help news outlets and academics to understand their public!

This questionnaire is aimed at people who were university students in 2022/2023 and those who are currently students in 2023/2024.

It lasts a maximum of 8 minutes.

Personal data will remain anonymous, so you can answer truthfully! If you have any questions or are curious about the results, you can contact me, Inês Amaro, at [ijaos@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:ijaos@iscte-iul.pt). Thank you for your contribution!

#### *Frequency and Interest*

##### **Q1. How often do you consume news?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume news (7)

##### **Q2. How often do you consume international news (which are not from your country of origin)?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume international news (7)

**Q3. Reasons for lack of consumption of international news: [Multiple choice]**

- Do not trust (1)
- Not beneficial (2)
- No relevant content (3)
- Can't speak foreign languages (4)
- No coverage of interesting topics (5)
- The news is sensationalist (6)
- Other (7)

**Q4. Rate your level of interest in international news.**

- Very Uninterested (1)
- Disinterested (2)
- Slightly Disinterested (3)
- Slightly Interested (4)
- Interested (5)
- Very Interested (6)

**Q5. What international news topics do you consume the most? (Choose several) [Multiple choice]**

- Accidents and disasters (1)
- Environment (2)
- Careers (3)
- Science and Technology (4)
- Crime (5)
- Culture (6)
- Sport (7)
- Economy (8)
- Entertainment (9)
- Fashion (10)
- Politics (11)
- Health (12)
- Other (13)

**Q6. What international news topic do you prefer the most? (Only 1)**

- Accidents and disasters (1)

- Environment (2)
- Careers (3)
- Science and Technology (4)
- Crime (5)
- Culture (6)
- Sport (7)
- Economy (8)
- Entertainment (9)
- Fashion (10)
- Politics (11)
- Health (12)
- Other (13)

***Factors***

**Q7. How often do you consume international news through the media of your country (e.g. television, social media)?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume international news (7)

**Q8. How often do you consume news through foreign sources of media?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume international news (7)



**Q9. How often do you see news that is culturally / geographically close to your country of origin?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume international news (7)

**Q10. International news is relevant to my field of study/academic field.**

- Strongly disagree (1)
- Disagree (2)
- Slightly disagree (3)
- Partially agree (4)
- Agree (5)
- Strongly agree (6)

**Q11. I have participated/continue to participate in the following political activities:** *[Multiple choice]*

- Sign petitions (1)
- Boycott products (2)
- Donate to political causes (3)
- Debates (online and/or in-person) (4)
- Protest/Demonstration (5)
- Share and/or comment political information (6)
- Voting (7)
- Member of a political group (8)
- Parish/Municipal assembly (9)
- Other (10)
- I have not participated in political activities (11)

***Traditional and New Media***

**Q12. In which Traditional media do you read/watch news?** *[Multiple choice]*

- Television (1)

- Radio (2)
- Newspapers (3)
- Magazines (4)
- Other (5)
- I don't watch/read news through traditional media (6)

**Q13. How often do you see international news through these media?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume news (7)

**Q14. What are the most important characteristics of these media? [Multiple choice]**

- Trust in information (1)
- Offline access (2)
- Diversity of news topics (3)
- No clickbait (4)
- In-depth reporting (5)
- Taste for touch (newspapers, magazines) (6)
- Other reasons (7)
- I don't watch/read news via traditional media (8)

**Q15. In which New media (with internet) do you read/watch news? [Multiple choice]**

- Social media (non-traditional media profiles) (1)
- Social media (traditional media profiles: of newspapers, television, ...) (2)
- Traditional media Apps (of newspapers, ...) (3)
- Traditional media websites (of television, newspapers, ...) (4)
- Search engines/browsers to access websites (5)
- Push Notifications (alerts, notifications) (6)
- Newsletters (e-mail) (7)
- Podcasts (8)

- Other (9)
- I don't watch/read news through the new media (10)

**Q16. How often do you consume international news through these media?**

- Several times a day (1)
- Daily (2)
- More than once a week (3)
- Weekly (4)
- Monthly (5)
- Rarely (6)
- I don't consume news (7)

**Q17. What are the most important characteristics of these media? [Multiple choice]**

- Trust in information (1)
- Low cost (2)
- Diversity of news topics (3)
- News tailored to your preferences (4)
- Accessibility (5)
- Interactivity (6)
- Other reasons (7)
- I don't watch/read news via recent media (8)

***Demographics***

**Q18. Gender:**

- Male (1)
- Female (2)
- Non-binary (3)
- Other (5)
- Prefer not to say (4)

**Q19. Age: [Open ended]**

**Q20. Country of origin: [Drop-down list]**

**Q21. Your field of study is:**

- Agriculture and Environment (1)
- Arts (Design, Multimedia, Video games, ...) (2)
- Business Sciences, Economics (Management, Administration, Finance, ...) (3)
- Social Sciences, Behavioural, Journalism (Politics, Geography, Sociology, ...) (4)
- Sciences, Mathematics and Computer Science (5)
- Law (6)
- Education (7)
- Engineering, Manufacturing, Architecture and Construction (8)
- Humanities (Languages, Translation, History, ...) (9)
- Health (10)
- Personal Services (Sports, Tourism,) (11)
- Security Services (Military, Civil Protection, ...) (12)
- Social Services (Socio-cultural Animation, Social Work, ...) (13)
- Transportation Services (Pilotage, Port management,) (14)
- Other (15)

**Q22. Additional Comments (Optional) [*Open ended*]**